



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

Version 3.3



Introduction to the Course: Women in Leadership and Ministry- Choosing the Better Part

Development Associates International

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Version 3.3

D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Course Description

Among other issues this course deals with women and their role in leadership. It asks the student to think through personal beliefs about God's original plans and purposes in creating man and woman. It allows one to explore reasons behind their beliefs and consider making changes. We believe it sets the stage to discover God's purposes for the Church and His Kingdom here on earth as it relates to the different genders. More than one-half of the members of the body of Christ are women. Their roles as well as the relationships between men and women in the family, civic society, political life, the marketplace and in the church and ministry are crucial dimensions of modeling and extending the Kingdom of God.

Learning Outcomes:

- Explore your own assumptions about what the Bible says about women.
- Study the importance of the authority of scripture, yet some of the challenges of interpreting it.
- Learn that changing your beliefs can be biblical.
- Understand the importance of studying the biblical role of women and how this course will approach that study.

Recommended Reading:

The required textbook for this course is: *God's Women - Then and Now* by Dr. Deborah M. Gill and Dr. Barbara Cavaness. ISBN: 0974953903 (Grace and Truth: 2004)

Module Units:

Unit 1: Choosing the Better Part

Unit 2: God's Perfect Plan for Relating and Working Together

Unit 3: God's Perfect Plan for Us to Rule His Garden

Unit 4: Tragedy and Redemption

Unit 5: How Do We Interpret God's Word for Today?

Unit 6: First Timothy

Unit 7: First Corinthians 7, 11 and 14

Unit 8: Ephesians 5

Unit 9: How Do I Choose the Better Part?

Overview of the Course

Let me just take a few minutes to explain how we are going to study this course. As you will see there are 9 units in this course.

Unit 1 is entitled "Choosing the Better Part". This is simply an introduction, laying the foundations and explaining both the risks and the possible rewards of studying further.

Unit 2 is entitled "God's Perfect Plan for Relating and Working Together." This unit starts the study of Genesis 1 and 2 to understand God's intention at creation. It then helps you to study the doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to this subject especially from the perspective of the history of the church and how biblical scholars have traditionally viewed the relationships within the Trinity. Forgiveness and humility are also themes in this unit.

Unit 3 is entitled "God's Perfect Plan for Us to Rule His Garden." This unit takes you through a study of the first chapter of Genesis to review God's purpose in creation, and enables you to compare your current beliefs with the "big" picture of God's purposes as explained in this passage. Understanding God's perfect plan gives us perspective to continue studying the rest of the Bible.

Unit 4 is entitled “Tragedy and Redemption.” As you might guess, it explores in detail the story of the “Fall” by studying Genesis 2 and 3, then it moves to a study of redemption through Jesus life, death and resurrection. We will take a good deal of time to review well known stories of Jesus’ ministry to see what we can learn from the way He treated women on a day to day basis. We will also explore whether or not the church needs to become more actively involved in areas of suffering and injustice faced by women.

Unit 5 is entitled “How Do We Interpret God’s Word for Today.” This unit explores the subject of interpretation and application of scripture. It also helps us begin to get to know Paul and the world in which he lived in order to understand his words in the New Testament better.

Unit 6 is entitled “First Timothy.” It asks us to consider the social implications of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on women and gentiles. We then get to know some of the women who worked alongside Paul and try to begin to understand the second chapter of First Timothy.

Unit 7 is entitled “First Corinthians 7, 11, and 14.” As the title indicates, this unit delves into the passages in 1st Corinthians that specifically address women’s roles. It looks first at corporate worship during New Testament times and then explores interpretations for each of the passages.

Unit 8. is entitled, “Ephesians 5.” This unit looks carefully at the historical and cultural setting of Ephesus. It also explores the implications of the setting being the return of a runaway slave and then looks at various interpretations of Paul’s words to husbands and wives in the light of this setting.

Unit 9 is entitled “How Do I Choose the Better Part?” For men and women it provides a good opportunity to reflect over the lessons learned in this course in the context of the biblical principle of stewardship and decide what action they should take. . It reviews familiar Old and New Testament stories where women play the key role, and helps the participant reflect on them in the light of this study. It encourages all participants to take whatever steps of change and risk the Holy Spirit is speaking to their hearts so that God’s Kingdom can be expanded.

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Course Information

Introduction & Overview

You are about to begin a course that explores the biblical perspective on women in leadership and ministry roles. This has been a controversial topic in many Churches in the modern world. The variety of cultural and social worlds the church finds itself in have differing perspectives on the appropriate positions and roles of both men and women. This

was true of the cultures in which the people of the Bible found themselves. This course seeks to understand and respond to the biblical materials so as to understand more clearly how modern followers of Christ may live more obediently and faithfully in their discipleship in this critical area.

The Method

The methodology for this course may be new to you. It is a blend of face-to-face instruction followed by long-distance learning. Most of us are used to studying by going to a classroom, listening to a lecture, taking lots of notes, then taking a test! After the classroom phase of this course you will study right where you live and work. You don't listen to a lecture and take notes; instead you read the "lecture" and respond to questions in your workbook. This method is unique because it is done at a distance yet is extremely interactive. We hope you will learn more because you are constantly applying what you are learning to your life and work.

The Authors

The authors of this course are Douglas Sparks and Jane Overstreet along with Maureen Menard. Throughout this course they tell you about their personal lives and stories from their own experience as well as lecturing from scripture and other sources.



Maureen Menard is one of the first female Vice Presidents of Youth with a Mission (YWAM). Maureen is also the International director of YWAM Discipleship Training School Centre. In that capacity she is part of the Executive team for YWAM and the Executive team for the University of the Nations. She regularly leads workshops for staff and mission leaders and is sought after to speak across the globe. Maureen is also a member of Alliance 229, which is a coalition of people wanting to use their influential positions to promote mutuality between male and female in the body of Christ.

Maureen attended the University of Massachusetts and transferred to Wheaton College from which she received a B.A. in Biblical Studies and an M.A. in New Testament Studies. Several years ago she published a Bible study series for Zondervan. She currently lives in Cape Town, South Africa and travels globally for her work.



Jane Overstreet is the President / CEO of Development Associates International (DAI) a non-profit organization providing training and consulting in leadership and organizational management to more than 9,000 Christian leaders in 30 countries annually. Prior to joining DAI, Mrs. Overstreet served for many years as the Director of Legal Services for Youth with a Mission International while living in the Middle East and Europe.

Mrs. Overstreet has also provided legal consulting for numerous other Christian organizations. She has published manuals on various legal topics including taxation, child abuse prevention, and immigration. She is a member of the American Bar Association and the Colorado Bar Association. She serves on the boards of several non-profit organizations and was a professor at Eastern University.

Mrs. Overstreet received a Bachelor's degree from Oral Roberts University, and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Tulsa, College of Law. She has done additional graduate studies in international law at European campus of the University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law, and in Global Economic Development at Eastern College. Mrs. Overstreet has been married for more than 28 years to Harold, who also works with Development Associates International. They have three children and three grandchildren.



Doug Sparks was born and raised in Colorado, USA. He attended Western State College earning a BS in Biological Science. He spent the next twenty years working with Youth with a Mission. He founded the work of YWAM in

the Middle East and founded the Institute of Middle East studies in Cyprus. He later founded Middle East Relief Services, Inc, a humanitarian aid organization working mostly in the Middle East. He later went on to be the Director for YWAM for Europe, Middle East and Africa for the relief and development projects. He was a founding member of the board of directors for Mercy Ships, Medair and several other aid organizations. Doug spent four years as a Senior Consultant with DAI and taught leadership courses in Central Asia, Russia, the Ukraine and Egypt. He presently lives in Colorado with his wife Candy

Select Bibliography of Recommended Reading

A number of free articles may be found at

http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/free_articles/free_articles.shtml

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Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 1

Choosing the Better Part

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

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E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 1: Choosing the Better Part

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Readings:

Appendix: *Why Not Women?* By Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton,
Chapter 1. It’s High Time

Articles found at <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/free-articles> As you finish studying each unit, go to this website and look to see if there are articles related to the subject of that unit and then read them. New articles are added regularly and we want you to get used to utilizing this resource as much as possible because it is so valuable.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify and explore your own assumptions about what the Bible says about women and explain how those assumptions affect the way you think about key texts.
- State key principles for interpreting texts as a result of studying the importance of the authority of scripture, yet some of the challenges of interpreting it.
- Indicate ways that changing your beliefs can be biblical.
- Explain the importance of studying the biblical role of women and how this course will approach that study.

Introduction

You are about to begin studying a segment of a course called **Choosing the Better Part—Women in Ministry and Leadership**. This unit is titled “**Choosing the Better Part**”. It is an introduction to this course on understanding the biblical role of women. It allows you to consider the basis for your beliefs and understand how Bible believing Christians can differ on the same issues. It encourages you to study this subject with an open mind and heart and with the help of the Holy Spirit grapple with these crucial issues.

Case Study: Rebecca’s Bible Study

Rebecca was a respected doctor, community leader, and long-term member of the local evangelical church. Her passion to help the poor and needy often put her in the forefront of efforts to mobilize the community and she was incredibly good at it. Lately she had begun to realize that the only time she seemed unable to make a meaningful contribution was at her church. She volunteered at the nursery, cooked meals for the parish dinners, and sometimes taught in the Sunday school programs. Though she didn’t mind doing any of these tasks, none of them were terribly fulfilling for her, nor did she feel that she did them particularly well. Usually when this troubled her, she just chastised herself that she needed to learn humility and grow in her willingness to serve others.

Lately though, this had begun to trouble her more and more. Sometimes she wondered if God had made a mistake about the gifts He had given her. She always seemed to be the natural one to lead and take charge at the hospital or when volunteering in the community, but of course that wasn’t appropriate at the church since she was a woman.

Ever since Rebecca had come to know the Lord she had carried a deep passion for Jesus. All she wanted was for her life to reflect His Kingdom. She wanted to be able to do all that she could for Jesus, but it seemed that the church was the place where she was able to give the least.

Rebecca attended a weekly prayer meeting led by an older woman in the church that provided a chance for her to fellowship with other women. Often they would drink tea and discuss life and pray together for a couple of hours at a time. This week Rebecca decided to introduce the subject of women in leadership and see what wisdom these other women could provide.

As they sat down together, Rebecca casually asked the question, “Do you feel like all women are to be in submission to all men?”

One woman quickly responded and said, “Well, I don’t know if it’s biblical, but it’s certainly the way the world works!” Everyone laughed and several picked up their tea.

Another lady looked thoughtfully around and said, “I don’t think that’s biblical at all. Submission to my husband, yes, but submission to all other men, I don’t think so.”

Another woman chimed in, “well, I don’t even believe that submission to my husband is really where the issue ends, I believe my husband should also be in submission to me. I believe the Bible draws a picture of mutual submission in marriage.” A couple of women in the room gasped slightly and one muttered under her breath, “Well we can see who the ‘feminist’ is here.”

Mary, a single lawyer and author said carefully, “Well, I’ve read some interesting articles that came out of a conference in America in the last few years about something called ‘re-imagining’ and I wonder if I need to explore the concept of God as a female deity, a goddess if you will. Don’t you think that’s interesting?”

This was just too much for some of the ladies and one of the, Sarah quickly said, “The Bible is perfectly clear about the role of women and that’s good enough for me. Women should submit to their husbands and they are not allowed to teach or be in authority over men!”

“But,” Mary responded, “what about Abigail and David?” Don’t you remember that Abigail deceived her husband, brought David all the food and gifts, and saved her household! There’s also the example of Deborah the judge and even Esther.”

Sarah came back quickly, “Well that was just Old Testament. Paul clearly says that women are to be silent in the church. We all know that passage!”

After several minutes of this, Rebekah said quietly, “Maybe we need a thorough Bible study on this subject so that we have a way of determining what the Word really does say overall.”

She began a process of reading everything she could on this issue of women in leadership. In the secular literature she quickly identified several streams of thought. One seemed to say that in order to be a successful woman leader you had to think and act like a man. Another was that women were so capable that they threaten most men and therefore men feel the need to dominate and control based on their physical superiority. Essentially men are the enemy and women must fight for their rights.

Although there seemed to be a little truth in several of these theories, none of them were very satisfying. Rebecca was firmly convinced that God had created her just the way she was and that she didn’t need to try and be like someone else. She was also convinced that the Christian faith must somehow provide answers for her questions that didn’t have to do with fighting and dominating.

She had come to the point that she almost didn’t care what the answers were. If the Bible truly said that women were to be in submission, not hold positions of authority and remain silent in the church then she wanted to obey her Lord completely. On the other hand if the Christian faith was what others seemed to believe, the only religion that truly saw women as valuable, loved and equal to serve in every role, then she really wanted to know.

She was ready to learn, ready to change, and ready to take the risk to obey God, wherever it led.

* This scenario is fictitious. Any resemblance to an existing organization or person is entirely coincidental and unintended.

Lecturette:

Welcome to this course called “Women in Leadership and Ministry—Choosing the Better Part.” I am excited to be studying this material with you. I truly believe it discusses a crucial issue in the church today, the biblical role of women. I believe God is going to use this course in your life as you study to help you to understand Him more and to follow him even more obediently. That is my prayer!

In fact, let’s just begin this study with prayer. Would you join me?

Father, we truly believe that you are the author and creator of all things and that you have wonderful purposes for all of your creation. Enable us to study this material together with open hearts and minds as we seek your understanding of what is often a challenging subject. Protect our minds as we study from any lies of the enemy or being misled in any way. We only want to understand your word better and follow you with our whole hearts. We ask that the result of our study together will be more glory to your name and that Your Kingdom would be established here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Now let’s begin this study with an explanation of the subtitle of the course as that seems like a very logical place to start! “Choosing the better part.” Does anyone have any idea where that phrase in scripture comes from? Think about it for a few minutes. I’ll give you a couple of clues. Those are words of Jesus, and they come from the gospel of Luke.

Ah, yes, some of you will have figured it out by now. This comes from the final sentence of Luke 10:42, from the story of Mary and Martha. Now all of you will remember the story of Mary and Martha, but I want you to stop now and turn to that passage again and read it, asking yourself, what is the main point that Jesus is trying to make here in the 42nd verse?

Answer Box # 1

Stop and read Luke 10:38—42. What is the main point that Jesus is trying to make in verse 42?

I have read this passage, and heard it taught since I was a child. Of course it has to do with establishing the importance of the contemplative life over against the active one, our devotion to God and to His truth. But what about Martha? Was she less devoted to Jesus because she was trying to feed him and those who had come with him? Wasn't she serving in a way that would be found as appropriate in almost any culture today? I know when we have guests in our home for a meal, usually my husband greets them at the door, and maybe I join him there to say hello, but soon I disappear into the kitchen to finish the meal preparations.

In fact, the more important the guest, the more quickly I disappear, because I have decided to make the nicest food possible for them, serve them as graciously as possible, and honor them completely. So what was wrong with Martha's approach here?

Was it wrong for her to ask Jesus to tell Mary to help her? Was it wrong for her to be a little unhappy with the fact that Mary was just sitting and not helping? To ask Jesus to bring correction was probably a very culturally correct thing for the older sister to request. In verse 38 we see that it is called Martha's home, so she was probably the older sister.

What is Jesus main point in this rebuke? Certainly it has to do with loving the teaching of the Kingdom of God, more than being distracted with everyday life. Certainly it has to do with choosing quiet time alone with Jesus over the busyness of life. But there is an equally strong message here if you understand the culture of the day. You see in the culture of the first century, not unlike some of our own modern day cultures, the role of the woman was homemaker and hostess. This was the respected and valued role for a woman.

So what was Mary doing in this situation? Was she just resting, and casually talking in the living room with Jesus? If so, she would have been seated in a chair, or possibly reclining on a couch. Sitting at the feet of Jesus had a very special connotation. That was what disciples did with their masters, and what Mary was doing in this situation. Possibly it's a little like modern day gurus and their followers. It is a specific posture denoting discipleship and learning for a role of future ministry. This was what Mary “had chosen.”

*“The passage challenges the role designations for women in the first century; the role of disciple and future minister of Jesus' message is more critical than that of homemaker and hostess and is also open to women.” (Craig Keener, *The Bible Background Commentary, New Testament*, InterVarsity Press, 1993, page 218)*

Martha was devoted. She was doing her best to serve in the expected culturally appropriate way for a woman, through cooking and being a hostess. Yet Jesus specifically says that Mary has chosen “the better part”, listening to Jesus teaching, being discipled by Him and preparing for future ministry. What an incredibly harsh indictment on the culture and

the expectations it placed on women. These are not the words of some modern day “feminist.” These are the words of Jesus.

How does this fit with your perspective on the role of women? Does this challenge you at all? Aren’t women designed to serve men, to provide hospitality and to keep the home? Isn’t this the ideal Christian role model for women?

So what exactly was Jesus saying here? He’s not saying that those things are bad. He’s not condemning Martha for her hard work, but he does talk about something else being better.

I love the very last phrase in that verse. Go back and look at it. In my translation it says, “for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” What cannot be taken away from us in our Christian walk? Our relationship with the Lord, and those works that we do that are in obedience to Him. Not all our works, even if they are good, as Martha’s obviously were, but rather those things that He requires of us.

This is what we will talk about, wrestle with and try very hard to understand. What are the roles that God desires women to fulfill? What does God require of women? How do we separate that from what our culture demands or what our family, friends or even our pastor says is the role of women? What if you are the pastor and / or a husband? Do you understand what the Bible says on this issue? Are you leading in obedience to biblical truth? Are you sure?

Secular Feminism

As we begin this study I want us to lay down a couple of foundational points that are crucial for us to agree on in order to continue this study.

First of all this course is not about secular or “liberal” feminism. Do you know what that term means, feminism? Stop for a few moments and write down your understanding of that term.

Answer Box #2

Give your understanding and definition of feminism, or more specifically secular feminism. Are there things about modern or liberal secular feminism that troubles you or seems to violate your Christian beliefs?

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen’s book *Gender and Grace*, quotes Alan Alda, an actor, as saying: “A feminist is anyone who believes that women are people.” She goes on to say that if that was a definition, then every Christian should be a convinced feminist!

Unfortunately most of us, however, have a reaction to the word feminism whether or not we have a clear definition. Of course words in themselves are not evil, but this particular term in my culture has come to mean things that are very negative to many evangelical Christians. It has an ugly connotation for many people, of women fighting for their rights, wanting to become like men, or wanting control in most situations. Feminists have been accused of destroying the nuclear family, and promoting homosexuality and abortion.

Usually the term carries with it a sense of anger and bitterness. I remember very specifically about 25 years ago when I was in law school, being part of a group called the Women’s Law Caucus. Actually I was the vice-president, if I remember correctly. At the time, an amendment to the US constitution was being debated nationally, called the Equal Rights Amendment. It specified that women, among others, were to be treated equally to men.

Even though I agreed with the language of the amendment, I found some of the older women’s attitudes to be so hostile and angry that I refused to demonstrate with them for the

passage of the amendment. I was so repulsed by their “spirits” that I couldn’t cooperate in their cause, even if I believed in it.

I think many evangelical Christians find themselves in the same dilemma today. Even though they believe in at least some aspects of equal treatment of women for example, they are so repulsed by what they have seen and read by classically “feminist” authors that they reject the entire message. Included in that message often are things that most evangelicals would reject, such as the woman’s “right” to abortion, or special rights for homosexuals, or the “right” to sexual promiscuity. The messages have gotten so entangled that believing Christians have rejected all aspects of the message.

It’s like the expression in my culture, “they’ve thrown out the baby with the bath water.” Even if you don’t have that expression, it probably creates such a clear picture that you’ll immediately understand it. It’s easy to toss out both what needs to be thrown out, but in the process also throw out what is precious and needs to be cared for. I believe many Christians at least in the West have done that with the message of equality for women. They mistake anything that sounds vaguely like that demanding, angry, compromising voice and silence it as evil and unchristian.

Please hear me clearly when I say that this course has nothing to do with secular feminism and with the part of its agenda that compromises biblical truth. This course has nothing to do with angry, bitter women fighting for their “rights.” Instead, this course has everything to do with seeking God’s truth and being willing to take the risks and make the sacrifices to serve Him as He has called us to do.

I personally believe that Satan has used the repulsion that many of us feel toward those promoting secular feminism as a huge “smoke screen” or decoy to miss a truly crucial issue which God wants the church to address. That issue is recognizing that women and men have equal value and should have equal opportunities to use their gifts to further God’s Kingdom. At stake is an enormous force, the effective use of more than 50% of the Church’s members on this earth.

So the first issue that I want to clarify is that this is not a course that promotes the secular feminist agenda, but rather this is a course seeking for God’s perspective on gender.

The Authority of Scripture

Which leads me to the second issue that I want us to understand together. Those who have contributed to authoring this course are firmly “evangelical,” by belief. By that I mean firmly committed to the divine inspiration of the Old and New Testaments and therefore the authority of the scripture as the basis for all beliefs.

Fundamentally, the primary thing that unites evangelicals is our belief in the authority of scripture and that it serves as our guide on all issues of faith. According to Webster’s Dictionary, “evangelical” means, “of or according to the Gospels of the New Testament.” Since we all believe in the same Bible, then surely we all believe the same things—right? Unfortunately no! What is incredibly disconcerting is that we as evangelicals often come to opposite conclusions about what those scriptures say and therefore what we believe! How can that be?

Please stop and answer the question below.

Answer Box # 3

How is it possible for Christians who agree that the scriptures are divinely inspired and the authority for all of our beliefs, to disagree over basic issues of the faith?

This is a very confusing question and turns on one simple issue, interpretation. You see, not only do evangelicals believe in the authority of scripture they also generally believe two further things. One is that there is sufficient content in the scriptures to provide us with all we need for our Christian life. In other words, all we need to know to answer any question we have about our life here on earth and how to live it in a way that is pleasing to God is in the scriptures.

Secondly, we believe that any Christian can read the Bible themselves and understand what God is saying to them in order to live a life pleasing to God. That’s not to say that there won’t be some confusing or obscure passages, but rather that generally the Bible can be understood by the average believer and obeyed.

Both of these concepts were basic to the Reformation and contributed to the birth of the protestant church in which the average believer did not need an interpreter to understand scripture but could read and understand it for themselves.

It is therefore very disconcerting when two equally committed Evangelicals read the same passage and take away very different meanings from it. In fact, for most of us, it is easier to question whether or not that other person “really” believes in God as much as we do and the scriptures. It is easier to dismiss them as not “true” believers and therefore be able to dismiss their views, then to take seriously their perspective and question our own beliefs.

Answer Box # 4

Stop and name some examples of fundamental issues where equally committed evangelicals (and other biblically based Christians) disagree. List those below.

You’ve probably been able to think of several. The ones that first came to my mind were methods of baptism, war versus pacifism, issues of church government, speaking in tongues and other “supernatural” manifestations, and end time prophecy to just to name a few.

It is easy to assume that those who believe differently than you on any of these issues don’t really believe what the Bible plainly says. Of course that is why we have hundreds of denominations in the world today because believing Christians could not agree on the “plain” truth of the Bible.

The issue comes back to interpretation of the meaning of scripture. Although we agree that the scriptures are divinely inspired, their reading and interpretation are left to the minds of very human people and therefore interpretation is inherently a human and inexact science and one we will devote a good deal of time to when studying the passages of Paul later in this course.

There are always two steps that are required when studying scripture. Does anyone have any idea what those two steps are? Stop and answer the question below.

Answer Box # 5

What are the two basic steps required when studying and interpreting scripture? If you don't know the exact terms, just think logically about what is required to understand and apply something that was written hundreds or thousands of years ago, by people you don't know and in a culture you are not familiar with.

For those of who have formally studied theology this will be an easy question, but for those of us who have not, its may not be so simple.

The first step to understanding something that was written long ago and in a foreign setting by people we don't personally know, is to try and understand what they meant for it to say at that time and in that setting. The nice long theological term for this is “exegesis”. But don't worry about trying to remember that word, because I never seem to remember it myself. What is important to remember, is that it is always the first step in understanding scripture because ultimately we are all trying to understand what the Bible says to us today. Scripture can't possibly mean something now that it never was intended to mean when it was written. Therefore it is terribly important to try and understand all the possible things it could have meant then.

The second fundamental step is to take our understanding of what the passage meant back then and apply it to our lives now. The term theologian's use for that process is called “hermeneutics.” Again, don't worry if the word is unfamiliar. It is something that we do every day when we study scripture, often without thinking. When we read a passage like, “the wages of sin is death...” That doesn't require a lot of interpretation because its true today, just like it was then. But, if we read a verse like, “Greet the saints in Rome.” We automatically realize that's not possible. Those saints died a long time ago, and most of us don't live in Rome, so we can't do that anyway. See, we all do hermeneutics rather automatically. Whether we do it well or poorly is the subject of one of the units of this course.

Changing Your Beliefs

Now let me ask you another question that may be disconcerting. Are you willing to change what you believe? Stop and think about that question and write in your answer below.

Answer Box # 6

Are you willing to change what you believe? Why or why not? Is it scary to think about changing something you believe? Why?

What did you think about that question? Are we willing to change what we believe? Maybe our first response was “no, of course not!” We know what we believe and we are not about to change it. That's not a bad response, but maybe not totally realistic.

The fact is, most of us change what we believe on a regular basis. Maybe we don't change complete belief systems, but we are constantly adjusting our beliefs. Any time we

listen to a sermon, or attend a Bible study we learn something new, or add some facet to our beliefs.

Answer Box # 7

Think of examples of religious beliefs that you have changed in the last 10 years. List at least a few.

You probably were able to think of several beliefs you have changed. One example that comes to my mind is an example my pastor used. He told me recently that he went into the army as a nominal Christian. While serving he had a very personal encounter with God. As a result he suddenly saw war as an evil thing that he didn't feel he should be participating in. His belief about war changed completely.

The good news about this ability to grow and change our beliefs is that Christian history is full of examples of where this happened in the church. This is not something new to you and me. One of the examples from my culture is around the issue of slavery. Less than one hundred years ago in my country large segments of the “conservative” traditional church firmly believed that slavery was biblical. If we go through the scriptures it is not possible to find a verse that specifically says slavery is wrong. In fact in the New Testament there is a verse telling slaves to obey their masters. The church primarily in the South of the United States used that verse and some in the Old Testament to build the case that slavery was biblical.

Today it would be hard to find an evangelical that holds that belief. How did the change come about? Most people today would say that the Bible has always stated that people should be treated with justice and that there are many principles there that clearly condemn a practice like slavery. The problem that the church had in the early part of this century in the US was that the culture said owning slaves was okay. It was also something that created an economic advantage for some people. Business people who were elders and donors to the churches put pressure on church leadership to condone the practice and used the “plain truth” of scripture to uphold their argument. Has the Bible changed since then? Of course not, but the church's beliefs have.

Even scripture records for us an example of committed believers disagreeing over the meaning of scripture and wrestling with changing part of their beliefs. Can you guess what I am referring to in the book of Acts?

Turn with me to the 15th chapter of Acts and read that entire chapter. What was the issue here and what did they together decide to change in their belief system.

Answer Box # 8

Stop and read Acts Chapter 15: 1-35. What is the debate about in this chapter before the whole council of Jerusalem? Why was this a major issue? What was the outcome of the debate?

This is interesting reading when you consider what was at stake here. Basically the traditional interpretation of the Law was clear on who could be considered a child of God in Jewish tradition. It was obvious to all concerned, however, that God was “saving” Gentiles. But then the huge issue arose: shouldn’t they then be circumcised and instructed in keeping the entire law. Again tradition was very clear on this issue. The problem was that the Holy Spirit seemed to be doing something new! Finally James looks at the overall picture in the Prophets, and enables them to think about a new way of interpreting passages of the Old Testament. Finally all agreed that they must change tradition, and accept non-circumcised gentiles as full members of the Body of Christ. This was revolutionary!

As you might guess not all went along with the Council. Historians tell us that there was a sect that refused to go along with this “liberalism” and instead maintained the traditional conservative interpretation of the scripture. These were known as the Ebionites. Have you ever heard of them? No, I didn’t think so. They don’t seem to have made much impact on the Church over the long-term, which is a fact worth considering.

In his book, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*, R.T. France comments on Acts 15:

“My point is simply to illustrate that in the ongoing work of God it is sometimes permissible, indeed necessary, for his people to change their minds. What this example illustrates is also that when such a change of mind takes place, it is not necessarily a matter of abandoning the authoritative teaching of the Bible in favour of a secular agenda, but more likely a matter of discovering that there is more in the Bible than we had realized...” (p. 19)

Conflicting Messages

My confession at this point is to tell you that I have had to change my own mind when it comes to the subject of this course, the role of women in leadership and ministry. It all started very innocently a few years ago walking through my office at Eastern College where I was an adjunct professor. One of the other professors and I were talking and I said something about needing to “submit” to my husband on something since he was the head of the home. This professor who I knew to be a deeply Godly man stopped and quietly said, “Do you believe that’s what the Bible says?”

I immediately got defensive and said all sorts of things about what I believed to be true about the proper roles of men and women. He just quietly listened and then said again, “Are you sure that’s what the Bible actually says?” That was it! Because I so respected this professor, I realized that I needed to go back and figure out if somehow I might be wrong. Why did I believe what I believed about the roles of men and women? Was it truly biblical or was it based more on tradition and culture?

I might have just left the issue there, because it’s often easier to do that than to really question an area of our own beliefs, but something else happened simultaneously. At the mission organization where I was working I began to be given more and more leadership responsibility. One day the board asked me to become the director. Suddenly I found myself in a very confusing position. Was it okay for me to play this role? Was it biblical? God seemed to be confirming in several ways that I was to take on this responsibility, but suddenly I realized that my life and theology did not line up! My theology said that a woman should not be in spiritual authority over men, but I had just accepted the role of director of a Christian mission with several older men “under” my direction!

Answer Box #9

Can you think of any conflicting messages that girls or women in your country get through the culture or media?

Those of us who are women often receive conflicting messages or live a variety of roles that seem in conflict.

For today’s teenage girl in America the dualism is nearly overwhelming. They are told to be pretty, thin, sexy, “feminine”—but be rough, tough, smarter, better... It is terribly confusing and ultimately impossible to obey all the messages.

Women in some churches receive mixed messages as well. The message sounds something like this.

“God loves you, you are His creation, you are redeemed, and you have value. BUT there are only certain roles you can play and none of those roles carry any authority or much influence. You need to know your place and stay in it, otherwise it’s obvious you are just unwilling to serve.

If you are married, have children, home school those children and have a ministry in your home of hospitality—then you are living out God’s REAL intentions for women. There is really only one role you should play and it is a secondary service role, primarily confined to the home.”

The implicit message is that you are second-class because of your gender alone.

In many cultures it is much worse: women have no value. Infanticide of the girl child is on the rise in some countries (see the readings in Unit 4), forced marriages means you are only property, and often the church in those cultures reinforces that message rather than shedding light into it. They conveniently use Scripture to reinforce cultural norms that are based on other religions rather than shedding the light of the gospel and a resulting different standard into the situation.

We desperately need to examine our thinking on this subject to make sure it’s really right. If we don’t, we run the risk of reflecting something less than God’s Kingdom to the rest of the world. We also run the risk of not releasing women called into ministry into those ministries, supporting them and seeing people reached with the gospel that will never be reached any other way. I would go so far as to say that a renewed understanding of God’s biblical perspective on women is key to reaching the unreached...but more on that later!

What do you believe?

Before we begin to engage in this study and consider changing some of our beliefs, one of the important steps we need to take is to ask ourselves what do I believe?

Stop now and look at the questionnaire referred to in Box 10. Read the statements and fill out the questionnaire before you continue further. Keep in mind you should try to be as honest as possible because this is for your benefit, not for anyone else to see.

Answer Box #10

Questionnaire: Complete the following questionnaire as a chance to reflect on some issues of what the Bible teaches us about the role of women. This is only for your own use and reflection, so respond as honestly as possible. Others will not see it unless you choose to show it to them. On the Questionnaire, read each statement and then check the box that most accurately reflects your belief: 1, you wholeheartedly agree; 2, you agree somewhat; 3, you are not sure; 4, you disagree somewhat; or 5, you totally disagree.

Quick Questionnaire

What do you believe?

	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
	1	2	3	4	5
1. God created man and woman to rule equally over His creation.					
2. Men are generally better suited for leadership than women.					
3. God is male and reflects primarily male characteristics.					
4. In the Garden of Eden, Eve committed the first sin; through her, sin came into the world.					
5. God cursed Eve in Genesis 3 because of her sin.					
6. Jesus did not disciple women.					
7. Paul taught that women cannot teach men in the church.					
8. Women are to be in submission to men.					
9. It is not culturally acceptable for women to hold positions of leadership in most Two-Thirds World countries.					
10. Biblically, women are primarily responsible for child raising.					

Why did we look at these questions? Why is it important to understand what we believe? The reason it is SO important is because what we believe affects what we do.

In North America, we have a familiar fairy tale about a beautiful young woman who found herself in a situation where she was told daily that she was worthless, useless, ugly and unfit. She had lost her father and had to live with step-sisters and an evil step-mother. They treated her cruelly and made her do all the difficult jobs in the house. They constantly told her that she was worthless, useless, ugly and unfit. She was told regularly that the only role she was capable of fulfilling was that of servant.

One day the King of the Kingdom decided to throw a ball to bring all the eligible young women of the Kingdom together for his son to meet, to find the one destined to be his bride. The prince was a very wise ruler. He was looking for a helpmate, someone who would be his equal, to rule and reign with him over the Kingdom.

The young woman nearly refused to even attend the ball because her evil step-sisters told her she shouldn't bother to go, that she was so worthless she shouldn't even try to be considered for the role. They told her that she needed to remember what her appropriate role was, that she was not created to be a princess. Even at the ball, the young woman could not believe that the prince really wanted to dance with her. She just couldn't believe she was worthy.

Many of you will know the rest of this story. Cinderella ran from the ball but lost her shoe in the process. The prince searched the kingdom for the beautiful girl from the ball. In spite of the tricks of the evil step-sisters, the prince found Cinderella and asked her to be his bride.

The near tragedy here is that Cinderella almost missed her destiny because she believed the lies told to her by her evil step-sisters. She didn't understand and was almost unable to believe what she was actually created for.

What does Scripture really say to us about our destiny as women in the Body of Christ? Is it the same thing that the church and its leadership have told us for the last few years? Are the words of the church and leadership more like that of the evil step-sisters, that there are only certain roles women can play and that we are unfit for anything else?

What we believe affects what we do. Just like Cinderella, who almost didn't go to the ball and couldn't believe that the prince could be interested in her, our beliefs affect our actions.

Take a look at box 11 below and see what you think about your beliefs and how those affect what you do.

Answer Box # 11

How does what you believe affect what you do? Think of a simple example and discuss it.

What did you think of? Did several examples come to mind? The first one I always think of is very simple. If we think a certain food is poison we will refuse to eat it. Even if it is the most beautiful, tasty thing in the world, we won't even touch it if we believe it is truly poison. What we believe affects what we do every day.

What we believe the Scripture says will also affect what we do. That is why it is so necessary to go back and just check and see what it really says. We need to compare it to what we've been taught—and therefore believe—and see if there are any discrepancies.

How many of you have ever used e-mail? How about letters? Just think about any form of written communication. Because it is so “flat,” so one-dimensional, it is easy to have an e-mail or a letter misunderstood by someone. I will never forget the first time that happened to me. I was writing a very sensitive memo to several Christian leaders. It was on a topic over which there had been much disagreement. I carefully wrote the memo, but when one woman received it she wrote back to me very angry and hurt. I was shocked because I didn't mean to say what she obviously thought I had said. Sure enough, when I read the memo back over I saw how she had totally misunderstood my meaning. Have any of you ever had a miscommunication by e-mail or writing? If so, you'll know what I mean! Written communication is flat; it has no tone, no facial expressions, and no “cultural” background. It is easily misunderstood!

Studying the Bible is like that—it's dangerous! It's “flat” communication, like e-mail or other writings. You can't see the faces or hear the voices and intonations. We will talk about that more in a later unit when we talk about Paul's writings.

Danger / WARNING

I believe this study should come with two warning labels on it. The first is, **“Don't study this if you are not willing to change!”**

What we have found is that there is a price to pay for both men and women who are willing to honestly ask the hard questions. For women the cost is often a label (feminist, rebel, radical, angry, unsubmitive...). One reason I avoided this topic for so long was fear

of being misunderstood, as being labeled as something I find really offensive. BUT now I am teaching on it out of what I believe is obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

For men there is a threat to your status and pride. Worst of all, you might have to move over in your leadership to make room for others and—even worse—some of those others might be women!

The second warning label is “This will get emotional!” This course will get very personal and emotional. It’s an emotional subject whether you are a man or a woman. It goes to the very fiber of who we are. Again, I think that is part of why it is so incredibly important.

I’ve taught on this in many different settings, countries, and gender groups. One thing that is consistent is that everyone has strong feelings about the role of women!

We were in a workshop in India not too long ago teaching on leadership. One of the women in the group brought up an issue and said that part of the problem was a failure on the part of male leaders to recognize the giftings of women in this area. Quickly a man spoke up from across the room that women shouldn’t be involved in the type of leadership being discussed. Before I knew it there was yelling from three different corners of the room. A buzz of conversation erupted as everyone shared their thoughts with their neighbor. On it went—it took me nearly 10 minutes to get control of the class room back and even then the subject kept being referred to for the rest of the day! It is an emotional issue for both genders.

Why is it so emotional? I think there are several reasons. One is that it is a justice issue. Prejudice is at the root and that is irrational and emotional. We can see several examples of this in history. One is black slavery in North America. The American Church convinced itself that African Americans were not fully human. Nazi Germany convinced itself that Jews were inferior.

Another reason this is an emotional subject is because pride is sometimes involved. Men have written most of theology. It’s often slanted against women however unintentionally, as we will see later in the writings of the Jewish fathers. But this works both ways; it’s very easy to make men feel defensive about their roles of control and power, and to lump them all together and say ALL men have a problem in this area, thus condemning them as a group and not treating them as individuals.

This is also a spiritual subject. It requires deep healing for women and men. As you are doing this study or if you are leading a group, please be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and your group as you go through it. Be willing to stop and have a time of repentance, or prayer, or whatever the Holy Spirit leads you to do.

As I have been researching this area over the last couple of years, different stories have come to me of groups dealing with these issues. One came from a leadership school in Southern Africa. One week of the school was devoted to studying this subject. As these men and women studied together and God began a healing process, there were deep spiritual reactions. There were demonic manifestations, heart felt repentance, deep healing in both men and women, resulting change in their practices. Someone recently told me a similar story from a workshop in Latin America.

The enemy loves the conflict, confusion and resulting lack of effectiveness that has come from the division between men and women. It truly is an area of spiritual warfare. We’ll talk about that more in Unit 4 on The Fall. We need to recognize that anything with this much potential to unlock resources for the Church is of great interest to our enemy, the devil, and he is doing everything possible to keep us confused, angry and irrational on this issue.

There is a deep need for healing among the women of the world and ONLY the church has the TRUTH. Do you realize that Christianity is the only world religion that offers women equality? Unfortunately the Church at times has not accurately reflected that truth.

I believe God wants to do this across His body and I believe this study is one small piece of what He is up to. Why would He want to do this? Of course it’s difficult for us to understand God’s purposes, but it seems possible that what God has in mind is releasing a new wave of workers into His harvest fields for His purposes with power, authority and the blessing of the Church—in this case women!

Oh, I’ve done it! I’ve admitted the real purpose of this course to you! I want to promote a new wave of workers into the harvest and encourage those already there! It is as simple as that! And I sincerely believe it is on God’s agenda.

That is why in this study we are not going to present all sides of the argument equally, so to speak. Let me be very honest with you about that. Rather, this study will ask you to consider whether or not it is true that God created men and women to work together for his Kingdom not limiting what they can do based on their gender, but rather serving Him fully, based on their gifts. The course leaves you lots of room to think, discuss, debate and disagree, and hopefully it will challenge your thinking no matter what you currently believe.

While we acknowledge that brilliant theologians can make a good biblically based argument for a rather wide variety of opinions as to what the roles of men and women should be, we invite you to journey with us from Genesis through Paul’s Epistles to re-examine the bigger picture of God’s purposes in the world as they relate to this subject. As a leader, it is critical to try and grasp God’s perspective on this issue and lead in harmony with it for the sake of building His Kingdom.

In Summary—why study this?

We need to ask ourselves the question, why is it important to study this subject of the biblical role of women? We have talked all about it throughout this unit, but it is time to summarize and clarify those thoughts now. So stop and answer the question below.

Answer Box # 12

Before you continue, stop a minute and ask yourself, “Do you believe it’s important to study the role of women from a biblical perspective and, if so, why do you believe it’s important?” Write down your answer or discuss it with your small group and then continue in the workbook.

Let’s think about this a little further. Why is this so important to discuss and study? As I told you, I avoided this for a long time but one of the things that prompted me to begin on this subject was the innocent question of my then 12 year old daughter, Carina, who asked me, “Why do you only meet with men, Mom?” My answer, “Because for the last several years God has called me to a ministry of leadership development with Christian leaders and the vast majority of current leaders are men!”

What is wrong with this picture? What does it implicitly say to the next generation of potential women leaders, like my daughter?

In order for the Church to be all God has called it to be, it **MUST** be as accurate a reflection of the Kingdom of God as possible. This requires purity, holiness, and servant leadership.

First of all, we, as the Church, can’t be unjust in such a fundamental area and still be the Church. It is not an accurate reflection of the Kingdom and, therefore, the church does not attract outsiders. Why should a Hindu woman in India, suffering from rejection for her gender, be attracted to a Church that says, “Yes, Jesus loves you, but you are still only a woman?”

Secondly, we leave out a significant portion of the pool of leaders if we never ask this question. Maybe not 51% because some are called to other things besides leadership, things that the Church traditionally allows women to do, like teach children. Praise God that they have allowed that, because I believe that is one of the most important ministries the Church has. But there are other ministries that need to be supported, respected, upheld, and blessed that women must do if the unreached are going to be reached. The unreached of the world present special challenges and, as the body of Christ, we need access to every resource we can get in order to face those challenges successfully.

We have to be willing to encourage, support and utilize every gifting in the body of Christ, no matter what gender “package” it shows up in, or we are short changing ourselves.

Third, we constantly undermine the women who are in leadership. A woman in leadership in the Christian world HAS to know what she believes in this area. There is too much pressure on a Christian leader from every other angle to also be fundamentally questioning whether it’s “God’s will” for her to be doing this.

A fourth issue is that we are dangerously close to leaving most of the intelligent women of the world out of the church because there is no place for them. Let me tell you about a dinner I went to a couple of years ago in Colorado Springs with women who had left Christian ministries to start their own successful companies. All of them had worked in churches or Christian organizations and been refused advancements or been stopped from moving forward in ministry solely because they were women. They were talking about the popularity of the “goddess” religions in the US today for intelligent business women and political leaders. These women have become isolated within the Church and are leaving the church to find a faith that accepts them as they are. As misguided as that is, it clearly reflects what happens when the Church is not an accurate reflection of God’s Kingdom.

As I began researching this subject, I had meetings with women in leadership in six Two-Thirds World countries to ask for their input. Besides being lots of fun, several things became clear during these sessions.

First of all, it seems that churches in North America are more restrictive to women than much of the rest of the world. This was indeed a shock, but none the less true. Except in a few mainline churches in America, women are rarely allowed to hold positions of responsibility and leadership beyond leading the “women’s ministry.”

The effect North America could have on this subject to the rest of the world is truly frightening because we always seem to manage to export everything that we believe or have! For example, it has been reported that the vast majority of house churches in China are led by women. What if China was suddenly open to foreign missionaries? Can you imagine these powerful American speakers coming in and ruining a beautiful thing God has done there by telling women they can’t lead these churches because it is not the way we do things in America and even telling them it is not biblical!

Another thing I realized is that there have historically been two situations when women were allowed to hold any role in the Church. One of those is during or right after revival. We’ll look at the biblical example of this at Pentecost in a later unit. The other situation is in times of crisis, which is often the case today in parts of the Third World. At these times, the church under pressure doesn’t have the “luxury” of debating whether or not women should be allowed to do certain things. They need the help too desperately to discuss the issue.

In summary, this subject of the biblical basis of women in leadership is so important because the Church, if it’s not really an accurate reflection of the Kingdom, won’t attract non-Christians and won’t utilize all its resources to reach the unreached.

This just can’t continue if we are to fulfill our commission as believers. This is about obedience to Christ’s commission, not something we have the luxury to just contemplate or consider. We must take it very seriously.

So then the question becomes what do we do? As I have researched this subject on why this is such a problem and what needs to be done, certain things have become clear and resulted in this material. There are basically three things that need to happen. Step 1, re-examine our theology. Step 2, encourage one another in truth. And 3, let the Holy Spirit heal and change us.

We need to re-examine our theology. We need to search out the truth. Most Godly women want to do the “right” thing. Only the rebellious, negative model of woman “fights for her rights”—most of us don’t want that as a role model and rightfully so. This is true for both men and women. Most men in leadership truly believe that the way they treat women is biblical. We all need some light and we need to find out if what we believe is the truth. We need to all find out if we are truly “choosing the better part.”

The second thing we need to do is encourage one another. There needs to be encouragement for both women and men to do something different. Hopefully this study will provide encouragement.

The third thing is that at least some of us need to change, some of us need to forgive and some of us need healing. We all have things we can learn as we open our hearts and say, “God show me the truth.”

Enjoy this study. Participate in it with an open heart and mind and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit as you seek God’s truth on this subject. Please keep in mind that the Bible always has more in it than we understand.

Final Assignment:

Final Assignment

- *We have discussed several concepts in this introduction. What stands out to you about why a study of the biblical role of women is important? What about for you personally? Why do you believe God may have you studying this course? Write down your thoughts.*

- *While doing the above, think about the issue of change. Are you willing to change something you believe? Why or why not?*

Readings

Articles found at <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/free-articles>

We recommend that you go to this website frequently and look at articles related to the topic of the current unit you are studying, beginning with this unit.

Why Not Women?

*A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership**

By Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton

CHAPTER 1: IT'S HIGH TIME!

By Loren Cunningham

I have a dream of a spiritual awakening sweeping the world through this emerging generation, the millennium generation. I see the Gospel finally being spread to every person in the world, with every nation and every people group disciplined with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

An old apostle, Simon Peter, also had this dream. He saw the beginning of its fulfillment on the day of Pentecost.¹ An old prophet, Joel, predicted that in the last days this dream would come true as sons and daughters would prophesy.² An old king, David, had the same dream, saying that a great host of women would proclaim the Good News.³

In the near future, the red-hot core of the spiritual awakening will be those now entering university and younger, a generation connected worldwide, not just through music and fashion but by common thoughts and by instant communication through the Internet. This connection will help speed the message given by Jesus two thousand years ago.

As I envision this, I see every little girl growing up knowing she is valued, knowing she is made in the image of God, and knowing that she can fulfill all the potential He has put within her. I see the Body of Christ recognizing leaders whom the Holy Spirit indicates, the ones whom He has gifted, anointed, and empowered without regard to race, color, or gender. This generation will be one that simply asks, "Who is it that God wants?" There will be total equality of opportunity, total equality of value, and a quickness to listen to and follow the ones the Holy Spirit sets apart.

This new generation will not be bound by traditions hindering women from obeying God's call the way my generation has. Instead, they will take a fresh look at the Word of God, knowing that the Holy Spirit will never do anything that contradicts His Word. As this emerging generation studies the Bible free of cultural blinders, they will see that the Lord has always used both women and men to proclaim the Good News and to prophesy the Word of God to their generation.

CATCHING THE JET STREAM

Sometimes we have to be willing to go in a new direction. Perhaps I can use an example. As I write this, I am on my third round-the-world ministry trip this year. I've discovered something during more than forty years of nearly constant travel. I experience less jet lag when I go west with the sun than when I head east against its direction. When I cross time zones headed west, my mind isn't fighting to stay behind in the country I just left.

However, when I do head east, I catch the jet stream, and my airplane goes faster, even though traveling in that direction goes against my mindset, against my mental habits.

I believe this is similar to what the Lord is wanting to do with this new generation. Instead of following comfortable old ways, mindsets, and traditions, it will turn and catch the jet stream, following the quickening winds of the Spirit to see a rapid fulfillment of the Great Commission, the dream of the old prophet, the apostle, and the king--the dream of God Himself.

It will be very difficult for the older generation to make sweeping application of the truths in this book. There are too many cultural bondages, too many obstacles to the dream.

For instance, I was in the capital city of a certain nation where I learned about a vital prayer movement that had been led by women in one of the homes. The women had prayed for various leaders and had seen dramatic results. The prime minister's wife came to know the Lord. Several members of the cabinet had come into the very house where the women were praying and had given their lives to Jesus. Then the prayer movement stopped. Why?

Some people began teaching in that country that women must not be in public ministry. They said that women couldn't have prayer meetings unless a man was present. They taught that women were more likely to become deceived than men. Women had to have "spiritual covering" to pray as a group. The women agreed to this, but none of the men ever showed up to give them covering. The prayer meetings were canceled. An effective work of the Holy Spirit was stopped.

This story illustrates what our spiritual enemy is doing all over the world, although usually in more subtle ways. As I travel, typically through thirty or forty countries each year, I see similar situations everywhere. This attack, which has been going on for centuries, is a leading crisis in the church for the twenty-first century.

Some say that the issue of women in ministry is the most divisive issue to confront the church since the Reformation. Bible-believing people are coming down on opposite sides of this argument, often with more heat than light in their discussions. Others try to ignore it altogether, thinking it is not their battle but a controversy between fringe elements.

This issue is hardly one involving a fringe element or a side concern. It's an issue that goes to the very heart of the church. When we look at this issue of women and their role, we are entering humanity's most ancient battleground--the war of the serpent against the woman. There are several aspects of the serpent's strategy concerning women that we need to look at together.

1. THE ATTACK AGAINST THE GOSPEL WORKFORCE

The devil knows his time is limited. He is doing everything he can to delay the completion of the Great Commission. One of his tactics is simply to cut the number of workers.

I see this issue of women in ministry from the vantage point of being a leader in missions for four decades. Two-thirds of all Bible-believing Christians are women. Fredrik Franson said, "When two-thirds of the Christians are excluded from the work of evangelizing, the loss for God's cause is so great that it can hardly be described."⁴

Jesus said we should open our eyes, look at the fields, and see that the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.⁵ Why would anyone look at the huge harvest we face and the tiny workforce trying to gather it in and seek to eliminate any workers whom God would call?

We don't need fewer workers. We need more! But the enemy is trying to cut back on the number of workers for the harvest in every way he can. I believe he is behind the confusion in the church about women and their active participation in ministry. And sadly, some people are unknowingly part of this strategy as they allow tradition and the misunderstanding of certain scriptures to prevent or blunt the ministry of women.

2. THE ATTACK AGAINST MEN AND THEIR MINISTRIES

The temptation to keep women from obeying God's call on their lives is an attack on males in the Body of Christ. On the surface, this attack appears to be only against women, but when we look deeper, it is also against men. The enemy appeals to the pride of men by saying that women are not their equal, not worth as much. Although some cultures call this attitude "macho," it's nothing more than pride. In the coming chapters of this book, David will expose how the forces of darkness used Aristotle, Plato, and other ancient philosophers to spread the idea that women were inferior, even subhuman. This attitude was echoed by some Jewish rabbis of ancient times who exchanged the God-given equality of woman in the Garden of Eden for a view that gave women far less value. All of this appealed to the pride of man.

The sin of pride is the refusal to accept who you really are. Pride enters in when you think you are better than others. It is the basis for racism, nationalism, and many other "isms." Pride is choosing to believe a lie about yourself. And pride can ultimately destroy you. Lucifer fell from his place in heaven because of pride, according to Isaiah 14. Now the devil attacks men through pride, telling them they are better than women. Because of some anatomical difference, he tells them, they can hold certain spiritual ministries that women cannot.

You can see the results of this attack on men in churches throughout the world. Go into a church in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe, North America--anywhere. You will find far more women than men. And the real prayer warriors, those on the cutting edge of intercessory prayer ministries worldwide, are usually women. Why? Because men have believed the lie that they are somehow spiritually superior to women. A man's pride destroys his intimacy with God and effectively stunts the growth of his ministry.

Sometimes leaders have tried to bring better balance by appealing even more to male pride. The church has given special titles, status, attire, and money to men to lead congregations made up mostly of women. In many parts of the world, I have seen a solitary male who receives a salary leading a church filled entirely with women.

Also, the Body of Christ has often elevated people who weren't ready for leadership, putting untried young males over more spiritually capable women. One missionary woman in Asia was passed over for leadership year after year, being placed under younger and younger men, even though she showed outstanding leadership qualities. She said, "For sixteen years I was told I had potential!"

When we begin to discover the revelation of God in this area, we will begin to free men to become who they were chosen to be alongside women in spiritual strength and numbers. Our churches will be balanced with men and women walking with God.

3. THE ATTACK AGAINST WOMEN

Ever since the Garden of Eden when God told Satan that the seed of the woman would bruise his head, the devil has been ferocious attacking women all over the world.

In countries based on biblical principles, however eroded, women fare much better than those in countries with little Christian heritage. But even in Europe and North America, women suffer more injustices than men. In the United States, women still earn only 74 percent of the salary that men earn for doing the same job.⁶ Many of these women are struggling to support themselves and their children, thanks to a spiraling divorce rate and "deadbeat dads" who don't pay child support. Add to this the fact that about 400,000 teenage girls will become mothers this year in the USA and will raise their babies without the help of the young man who fathered the child.⁷ These women are still better off than the more than 100,000 women who will be raped this year in the USA.⁸ Many more are molested as little girls--approximately one in every three girls is sexually abused before she grows to maturity.⁹

No one knows whether wife abuse is on the increase or is simply being more accurately reported. But more than 800,000 women will be beaten by their husbands or boyfriends in America this year. More than 1,000 will not survive.¹⁰

However bleak this picture seems, if you go to countries with little Christian heritage, it becomes even worse. According to World Vision:¹¹ 450 million women are physically impaired due to childhood malnutrition. In many societies, girls and their mothers eat only after the men and boys are fed.

- Women make up half the world's population but own just 1 percent of its wealth. Seventy percent of the 1.3 billion living in poverty are women.
- A girl is twice as likely not to be educated as a boy.
- Two million girls, mostly in Africa and the Middle East, are mutilated through female circumcision to diminish their sexual desire. Little girls who survive the procedure grow up to face painful sex, possible infertility, and a greater chance of dying during childbirth.

According to *Time* magazine:¹²

- In Brazil, it is justifiable homicide to kill an unfaithful wife.
- In Russia, a woman's office job can include having to sleep with the boss.
- In India, a husband and his parents sometimes conspire to kill his young bride after they have collected her dowry, freeing the young man to marry again and get another dowry. There are six thousand cases of this a year, and growing.

No Identity

When it comes to the suffering of women, there is one area of the world that weighs especially on my heart: some of the countries of North Africa and the Middle East.

In a North African airport several years ago, I saw something that continues to haunt me. I was passing down an elegant corridor of duty-free shops filled with luxury goods. Suddenly, a swarthy man with a stubby beard came down the hallway of the airport, dragging a young woman with a six-foot cord tied around her waist. He yanked her behind him as if he were pulling a cow, yelling abuse at her. I saw her face--I don't know why she wasn't veiled--an attractive, intelligent face filled with embarrassment. I looked around, wondering what to do, thinking a guard or policeman would intervene. But even though there were at least forty people in this secured area, including guards, no one paid any attention. No one gave the slightest sign that the man was doing anything out of the ordinary. Then he was gone, dragging the woman quickly down the hallway.

Who was this woman? Had the man come to this nation from some other Arab country to purchase a wife? Or had I just had a fleeting glimpse of the international slave trade, which continues even though it's illegal? And why was I apparently the only one in that crowded airport to feel any concern? I can still see that young woman's face--expressing humiliation and desperation. I can still feel the gall of my frustration--my complete helplessness to rescue her.

On another occasion, I flew on Swiss Air into the capital of one of the most conservative Middle Eastern countries. When I boarded the plane in Zurich, it was filled with men and women wearing typical Western clothing. Just before it landed, however, the women started filing into the airplane's restrooms. When they came out they were covered from head to foot with thick black veils--*chadors*. I couldn't see who was who anymore. The women had no faces. They had no identity. They were just anonymous figures shrouded in black.

I've been struck by the absence of women in public places in several Middle Eastern nations. Those I did see were covered from head to toe. Always silent, they passed quickly down the street like ghosts. Many religious authorities prefer to keep women inside all the time. In Afghanistan, the Taliban government has passed laws against girls going to school and against women working outside the home. The Taliban has gone so far as to require that women's ground-floor windows be painted black! Some of these women, now imprisoned in their own homes, are highly educated. Those without husbands have no way of supporting themselves. According to reports, many commit suicide.

For those who break religious rules concerning women (*pardah*), punishment is severe and is often carried out by the woman's closest family members. In *Nine Parts of Desire*, a British journalist tells of the execution of a young woman in a parking lot of the capital city of Saudi Arabia in 1977. A documentary on the BBC about her killing led to the British ambassador's being kicked out of the country. What was the woman's crime? She had tried to flee the country to avoid an arranged marriage.¹³

A few years ago, I read a book called *Princess*,¹⁴ coauthored by a Western reporter and an anonymous member of a wealthy Middle Eastern family. In the book, the woman tells of a leading family gathering at their poolside to watch the father drown one of his daughters. The daughter's crime? She had secretly dated foreigners.¹⁵ *Princess* tells of the stoning death of a thirteen-year-old girl who was gang-raped in her own home. Her attackers went free.¹⁶ Another young woman was sealed inside an isolation room on the top floor of her

family's mansion for the rest of her life. The room was specially constructed to deaden the sounds of her screams.¹⁷

Not all Muslims treat women terribly. In fact, many give women honor and respect. I personally believe that these inhumane practices come not from the teachings of any modern religion. They are inherited culturally, passed down from the earliest ages--from teachings by the ancient Greeks. But these modern-day practices are allowed, even legally endorsed, in several nations in the Middle East.

In some nations, female rape victims are imprisoned for adultery while their attackers go free.¹⁸ "Honor killings" of women and young girls are also on the rise. A woman doesn't have to be guilty of doing something immoral to be killed. Her father, her husband, her brothers, and her uncles may kill her simply because she is the subject of gossip. No one knows the exact number of honor killings, but in just one region of one of these nations, 350 young women--some as young as twelve--were murdered in one year. The preferred method of killing women to restore honor to the family is either to burn them alive or to throw acid on them.¹⁹

The Secret Holocaust

A few years ago, I found an article in a back section of the *New York Times* with the title "100 Million Are Missing."²⁰ The article explained how demographic scientists can predict how many males and females will be born anywhere in the world. But recent statistics show that as many as 100 million little girls are missing in today's generation worldwide--killed by their families because of their gender. Many millions of these missing girls are from India or China, where mothers routinely have abortions when they learn they are carrying a girl. "Everyone wants a son, so they get an ultrasound test and if it's a girl they have an abortion...ultrasound has brought great joy."²¹ Other girl babies are carried to term, then left outside to die of exposure.

According to the article, another reason for the 100 million missing girls is death by neglect. In many countries of the developing world, if a son gets sick, the family does everything possible to get medical help. If a little girl gets sick, she is often allowed to die.²²

It's important to note that the *New York Times* article showed that these missing girls are from the populations of predominantly non-Christian countries. Even in very poor but Christianized countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, the number of females growing up with the males is normal.²³ It is only the countries with limited Christian heritage that are slaughtering so many young babies because of their gender.

Think about it, though. I found this article in the back pages of the newspaper. One hundred million humans are killed, and the story didn't merit front-page treatment! Instead, the vicious attack on women is allowed to quietly continue throughout the world.

The degradation of women isn't a problem just of faraway countries with little Christian heritage. The problem is everywhere. Read these quotes from noted people in countries of the West:

- Prominent author Kurt Vonnegut said, "Educating a woman is like pouring honey over a fine Swiss watch. It stops working."
- Former U.S. Vice President Spiro Agnew said, "Three things have been difficult to tame: the oceans, fools, and women. We may soon be able to tame the ocean; fools and women will take a little longer."
- Former tennis pro Bobby Riggs said, "Women are about twenty-five percent as good as men, so they should get about twenty-five percent of the money men receive."
- Former President of Poland Lech Walesa said, "Women are to have fun with. In politics I prefer not to see a woman. Instead of getting all worked up, they should stay as they are—like flowers."²⁴

4. THE ATTACK AGAINST THE CHARACTER OF GOD

When bias against women is perpetuated by Christians, the message it sends is that God is unjust. A woman of the past who felt this injustice was the famous nurse Florence

Nightingale. Nightingale wanted to be a missionary, but there were no opportunities for her. She said, "I would have given [the church] my head, my hand, my heart. She would not have them."²⁵

That was the nineteenth century. A few years ago, I was in Zimbabwe preaching at a Christian conference. Afterward a young woman and her husband came up to speak with me. The woman had just completed seminary, graduating at the head of her class. Now she was not allowed to teach or preach. Her husband said, "This is so unfair!" I had to agree.

When Christian leaders act unjustly, it reflects on the character of God. Unbelievers watch and decide that if Christians are like that, their God must also be unjust. After all, if God gives gifts to a person, then prohibits her from using them, doesn't that make Him unjust?

Justice, like judgment, must begin in the house of God.²⁶ This issue of freedom and equality for women will be decided with or without the church. It is my deep conviction that for God to be glorified, the people of God must take the leadership. If we don't, we will miss the greatest opportunity since people fought for the freedom of slaves. If we don't seize this opportunity now, the church will fall behind for generations.

5. THE ATTACK AGAINST THE IMAGE OF GOD

The devil is not only attacking the character of God but also doing all he can to destroy the image of God. He knows that male and female together are created in God's image.²⁷ He is attacking homes and marriages because he knows that husbands and wives acting together in unity portray the unity of the Trinity. The enemy is also stirring up difficulty between men and women in the workplace. Male and female relationships were broken in the Garden, and since then, the devil has been doing everything he can to heighten the conflict.

Satan is seeking to drive a wedge between men and women with the radical feminist movement, playing upon the hurt and rejection that women have suffered. Because females and males together complete the physical expression of God's image in humanity, the devil is promoting homosexuality and lesbianism. God gave us gender differences, which we are to protect and rejoice in. Satan is using rejection and emotional wounds to destroy the revelation of the image of God.

Many Christians fear women preachers because they associate such change with radical feminism. But I agree with Pastor David Johnson from the Christian Missionary Alliance who said, "All my life I heard that [the acceptance of] women preachers was a spineless accommodation to feminism. However, the elimination of women from ministry is actually a sinful accommodation to a culture that isn't all that different from the male-dominated Jewish culture Jesus came to blow up. It's not that feminism is affecting the church--it's the church which has allowed culture to rob it of Christ's redeeming work for women."²⁸

If young women involved in militant feminism were shown how radical Jesus was in the way He treated women, thousands would find Him as their Savior and Redeemer, the source of the justice they seek.

When we look at these five attacks of the enemy, we could be discouraged. But Jesus came to destroy the works of Satan.²⁹ Jesus came to restore God's original design and purposes for men and women.

JESUS PUT WOMEN IN THE SPOTLIGHT

In the three greatest events of Jesus' life, His birth, death, and resurrection, women were in the spotlight.

His Birth

In a later chapter, we will examine the ancient world's belief that the father was the only source of life for a young child. The ancients believed that male semen contained tiny human beings that had been formed in a man's head. This belief led to the Greek "headship"

concept. The woman was only the "soil" for the miniature human to grow in until birth. Of course, if you think of women as nothing more than dirt, you will treat them like dirt.

God took that idea and stood it on its head by having Jesus born with only a woman as His earthly parent. Think about it! Mary was the only human source for Jesus' DNA.

His Death

Jesus' death was the central reason He came to earth, His most important ministry. In the Old Testament, people were commissioned--ordained for ministry--by the anointing of oil. Samuel took great pains to do this in secret for David. If King Saul had discovered the ceremony, he could have killed them both. But the ceremony had to be done. It was important. Samuel's anointing of David was the outward sign of God's calling David to do something significant.

Who anointed Jesus? Who commissioned Him for His most significant ministry on earth? It was two women. His cousin John baptized Him, but two women "ordained" Him. In the last week before his death in Lazarus' home, Jesus was anointed by Mary.³⁰ A few days later, another woman entered a house where Jesus was dining. She poured the entire contents of an alabaster jar containing expensive ointment over His head. Jesus said that because she did this, her act would be spoken of everywhere the Gospel was preached.³¹ He put her in the spotlight.

His Resurrection

After the Resurrection, Jesus again honored women, appearing first to Mary Magdalene. Women were the first to find the empty tomb. Jesus told them to go and tell the others that He was alive.³² So women were the first to hear Jesus' command to go and tell.

Women ministered alongside men during apostolic times, a fact we will see plainly illustrated in later chapters of this book. But as the centuries went by, the church became more influenced by surrounding cultures than by the Word of God. It was only in unusual times of revival that women were again allowed the freedom to obey God and minister.

WOMEN IN REVIVAL MOVEMENTS

When God begins a dramatic work of His Spirit, women are often in the forefront. Historians say that in most spiritual awakenings, women are accepted as ministers in the early stages. Later, as revival excitement cools into organizational structure, the women are squeezed out.³³

One of the greatest spiritual awakenings of history was experienced by the Moravians in the eighteenth century in eastern Germany. It was a move of God that spread to the whole world as men and women went out as missionaries. Moravians were the first Protestant missionaries. The Moravians held a twenty-four-hour prayer vigil for the unreached of the world that lasted more than one hundred years. A few years ago, Darlene and I visited Herrnhut, where it all began. We stood in their simple museum and looked at the paintings on all the walls. There were the heroes of the Moravian missionary movement; so many were women.

The spiritual awakening that transformed England and America was led by George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley in the late 1700s and early 1800s. The Wesley brothers had a remarkable, godly mother named Susanna. Besides spending time every day in earnest prayer, Susanna found time to teach each one of her nine surviving children. Mrs. Wesley preached to more than two hundred people every week in prayer meetings, which she led in her husband's parish. No wonder her son John used women leaders for the small groups called "classes" which spread their revival so effectively. Wesley said, "Since God uses women in the conversion of sinners, who am I that I should withstand God?"³⁴

In the early part of the nineteenth century, God again moved in revival in America through Charles Finney, who invited women to pray and speak in public worship. When Finney started Oberlin College, it was the first college in America to allow women to study alongside men. (It was also the first college to be racially integrated.) Finney was the first

Protestant leader to train women in theology. In 1853 one of his former students, Antoinette Brown, became the first woman ordained in America.³⁵

Another evangelical leader of the nineteenth century, Dwight Moody, was eager to allow women to preach. Moody Bible Institute offered its pastor's course to women up until 1929.³⁶ A. J. Gordon, the founder of Gordon College, wrote in defense of women in public ministry.³⁷ A. B. Simpson, who started the Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA), included women in all levels of his leadership. Besides women pastors, evangelists, and teachers, four of the CMA's first eight vice presidents were women.³⁸

Two influential women in the Holiness movement of the nineteenth century were Phoebe Palmer and Hannah Whitall Smith.³⁹ Palmer's book *The Way of Holiness* was in fifty-two editions by 1867. Smith wrote *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* in 1875. The book is still a well-loved classic for Christians all over the world. Smith played a leading role, teaching men and women through the printed page as part of the Keswick Higher Life Movement in Britain, which brought many thousands of people into a closer walk with God.

Other moves of God saw women being released. The Wesleyan Methodist Church ordained its first woman in 1863. General William Booth used women in preaching and leadership roles throughout the Salvation Army. The Church of the Nazarene and other Holiness churches starting up in the late nineteenth century also ordained women.⁴⁰ After the Pentecostal revival began in Azusa Street in Los Angeles in the early twentieth century, several women preachers became well-known. Just one of many was Maria Woodworth-Etter, who held some of the largest evangelistic crusades in America until her death in 1924.

WOMEN MISSIONARIES--TAKING ON THE HARDEST JOBS

It was in missions, however, that women really began to shine. There was what Dr. Ralph Winter called a “burst of female energy”⁴¹ into missions. Not many know that famous women's colleges such as Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, Wellesley, and Smith were founded to train women as missionaries.⁴²

By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were forty evangelical missionary organizations led by women.⁴³ Armies of women missionaries went out, not only evangelizing but also starting hospitals and schools, including an eight-thousand-student University in Korea and one of the best-run medical schools in the world in Vellore, India.⁴⁴ Women missionaries were the first to translate the Bible for hundreds of language groups. And they did it in the most rugged, remote places. As one writer said, “The more difficult and dangerous the work, the higher the ratio of women to men.”⁴⁵

Twice as many women as men marched into China as missionaries. Because women were hindered from teaching men in the Bible schools, they taught women in their homes and by the rivers as they washed their clothes. They produced so many Chinese “Bible women” that to this day, women are more prominent than men in the unregistered churches of China. Forty thousand of the fifty thousand house churches now in China are led by women.⁴⁶

I love reading stories of women heroes in missions. God seemed to delight in using women in the most impossible places, facing the most terrible odds. Gladys Aylward, known as “The Small Woman,” worked in some of the most difficult regions of China. She was turned down by every missionary society, so she went to China without any financial backing, traveling from London by train and crossing war zones in Russia and Central Asia. Her years of ministry in China won her a reputation for fearlessness. One time, she went into a bloody prison riot all alone and stopped it cold, using nothing but her authority in Jesus.

Hudson Taylor's wife, Maria, led groups of women missionaries deep into China on long preaching journeys where no Westerner had ever gone.⁴⁷ Southern Baptist missionary Lottie Moon was so successful at evangelism, church planting, and the training of indigenous pastors in north China in the late 1800s that her leader said, “I estimate a single woman in China is worth two married men.”⁴⁸

When we look back on what Jesus did to release women and what the Holy Spirit has done in periods of revival and missionary fervor, we must determine to do everything in our power to release those whom God is calling today. We must make sure we are not unwittingly part of the enemy's plan to weaken the workforce. We must remove the obstacles so that this new generation can follow God's leading.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, his friend came out from the tomb alive but still bound up in the burial shroud. Jesus told those standing around to loose him and let him go free. Lazarus needed someone's help to free him. Multiplied thousands of women today are alive in Jesus but still tied up by the burial shroud of human tradition--tradition that says they are second-class citizens--and cultural ideas that tell them they cannot carry out the highest callings of God's kingdom.

It has been two thousand years since Jesus came to proclaim liberty to the captives. It's time to set the women free. It's high time!

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¹ Acts 2:17-21.

² Joel 2:28-29.

³ "The women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host" Psalm 68:11b, as correctly translated by the NASB, which manages to reflect the Hebrew original most accurately.

⁴ Jewell Cunningham, *Women Called to Preach* (Lindale: C & R Publications, 1989), 42.

⁵ Matthew 9:37, John 4:35.

⁶ Current Population Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, Commerce Department, 1996.

⁷ *Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1997* (Washington: National Data Book, US. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration, Bureau of the Census, October 1997), 79, table 97.

⁸ *Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics*, 1995.

⁹ Gavin de Becker, *Protecting the Gift* (New York: The Dial Press, Random House, 1999), 15.

¹⁰ Bureau of Justice Statistics, Reports 98-100, 1996. See <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>

¹¹ Sheryl Watkins, "Women: Five Barriers Facing Women in the Developing World," *Today* (Federal Way: World Vision, April-May 1997), 4-7.

¹² Barbara Ehrenreich, "For Women, China Is All Too Typical," *Time*, (September 18, 1995), 130.

¹³ Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (New York: Anchor Books-Doubleday, 1995), 50.

¹⁴ Jean P Sasson, *Princess* (New York: William Morrow, 1992).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 181-185.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

¹⁸ Ehrenreich, "For Women;" *Time*, 130.

¹⁹ *Nightline* by ABC News, transcript from television broadcasts on February 16 and February 17, 1999.

²⁰ Nicholas D. Kristof, "Stark Data on Women: 100 Million Are Missing," *The New York Times* (November 5, 1991), C-1, C-12.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ "25 Years of Thumps," *New Woman* (October 1995), 234.

²⁵ Quoted with a footnote in Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Academy Books. The Zondervan Corporation, 1983), 233.

²⁶ 1 Peter 4:17.

²⁷ Genesis 1:27.

²⁸ Transcribed from "Women in the Church I and II," seminar by Pastor David Johnson on cassettes 1527 and 1528 from Growing in Grace, a ministry of the Open Door, 6421 - 45th Avenue North, Crystal, MN 55428.

²⁹ 1 John 3:8.

³⁰ John 12:1-8.

³¹ Matthew 26:6-13.

³² Matthew 28:10, John 20:17.

³³ "The Role of Women in Ministry as Described in Holy Scripture," a position paper adopted by the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, Dr. Zenas J. Bicket, Commission Chairman, published in *Pentecostal Evangel* (October 28, 1990), 12-17.

³⁴ Vinson Synan, "Women in Ministry," *Ministries Today* (January/February 1993), 46.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jon Trott, *Cornerstone Magazine* (Volume 25, Issue 108), 23. This was a review of Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War Between Traditionalism and Feminism*, published by Baker Books. Despite earlier endorsements of women in ministry by evangelical pioneers, the movement was influenced away from this stance by later writers. Perhaps the leading antifeminist evangelical writer was C. I. Scofield, whose *Scofield Reference Bible* was published in 1909. Scofield believed that women were unfit for leadership. Soon his views prevailed among evangelicals.

³⁷ Trott, review of *Women Caught in the Conflict* in *Cornerstone Magazine*, 23.

³⁸ Transcribed from "Women in the Church I and II" (see note 28).

³⁹ Synan, "Women in Ministry," *Ministries Today*, 46.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ralph D. Winter, "Women in Missions," *Mission Frontiers* (August 1999).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ruth A. Tucker (author and professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois), quoted in Julia Duin, "Women in the Pulpit," *Charisma* (November 1994), 26.

⁴⁴ Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, 233.

⁴⁵ J. Herbert Kane, *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 143.

⁴⁶ Winter, "Women in Missions"

⁴⁷ Melody and Keith Green, *Women's Right to Preach the Gospel* (Lindale: Pretty Good Printing, 1980).

⁴⁸ Kane, *Life and Work*, 143.

Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 2

God's Perfect Plan for Relating and Working Together

Development Associates International

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Version 3.3

D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 2: God’s Perfect Plan for Relating and Working Together

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Readings:

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1. *CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY: Statement on Men, Women and Biblical Equality*, taken from www.cbeinternational.org

2. *The Doctrine of the Trinity and Subordination* by Kevin N. Giles

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you will be able to:

- Name those areas/occasions where you need to forgive those who have hurt you or ask forgiveness of those you have hurt.
- Write a clear account of the meaning of the creation story and what God intended when He created man and woman.
- Understand and state the source of your own beliefs and practices in this area and identify areas where changes are most needed in your theology.

Introduction

You are about to begin studying a segment of a course called *Women in Leadership and Ministry – Choosing the Better Part*. This unit is titled *God’s Perfect Plan for Relating and Working Together*. It is about thinking through what you believe about God’s original plans and purposes in the creation of man and woman. It’s about how they were to relate to one another and work together. It allows you to explore why you believe what you believe and if you need to consider changes. We believe it sets the stage to discover God’s purposes for the Church and His Kingdom here on earth as it relates to the different genders.

Case Study: Rebecca’s Story

Tears stung her eyes as Rebecca hurried out of the church building toward the street. She thought she heard John, one of the church elders, calling her name but she pretended not to hear and scurried on toward the bus stop. She knew that her emotions were on the verge of spilling over and she just couldn’t risk talking with anyone right now. She needed some time alone with the Lord to sort her thoughts and seek His mind and heart.

Tonight had been the regular monthly leadership meeting of the small church where Rebecca had worshiped for many years. She had gone as usual, a long standing part of the church’s leadership. Through the years the elders and even the pastor had come to recognize her ability to think through issues and help them arrive at the best conclusions. She had never looked for leadership, but always seemed to find herself there, seeing the right direction to go, sharing an idea that others found helpful, or thinking through an issue in such a way that it seemed to help others avoid mishaps. Tonight she had looked forward to sharing a new vision that had been brewing in her mind for some time about a ministry to the growing number of poor and needy living not far from the door of the small building that housed their fellowship. There was so much need so close at hand and she felt the church could do a wonderful ministry with this group.

It was beginning to rain, and she was grateful when the bus arrived. Quickly she slid into a seat. The heat in the bus was stifling even though it was late evening and outside cooler night breezes had begun to blow.

Sitting on the bus staring out the window, images began to flash through her mind of the meeting that had just taken place. Right now she really couldn’t remember how the subject of church governance had come up. Pre-occupied by thoughts of the poor women and children that could be helped, her mind was not completely on the discussion. About the time she started listening intently a vote was being called for a new, more “orthodox” structure that would allow for church growth, which of course was the goal. Not wanting to confront the sincere young missionary from the US, who was pushing for this change, she held her questions thinking this would run its course. Not until they began filling the new positions did she have a growing sense of unease. When her name was proposed for one of the top roles, he quickly explained that—though he liked her personally—women, of course, could not hold such a position of authority as that was unbiblical. Though others seemed slightly taken aback, no one spoke up and the meeting continued.

Waves of emotion washed over her as she climbed wearily from the bus and made her way down the street toward her house. Thankfully because it was late, few others were on the dusty street to see the tears that she could no longer contain wash down her cheeks. It had been years since she had felt this way—unwanted, second class and somehow ashamed.

Rebecca had grown up in the south of the country in a small farming village near the river. She was the fifth child in the family and the only girl. Though girls were not as valued as their brothers, she grew up knowing that her parents had been happy with the birth of this girl child. After all, with four boys already in the family, one girl was not such a calamity.

There was always work to be done, but there was also time for daily games of football down in the field along the river. She loved the game and played with such ferociousness that she generally beat out all the other girls and often several of the boys for scoring. She could still remember the sad day, however, that her mother had pulled her aside and told her she was no longer allowed to play in those games. She was getting older, her mother explained and must realize that young women did not participate in such activities.

Not long after everything changed. One of her older brother’s friends, Wadi, came by the house one afternoon to see her brother, but he was not home. In fact no one else was home, a fact which Wadi seemed to quickly realize. Pushing past her into the house, he grabbed her by the hand, dragged her into a back room, forced himself upon her, then was gone. Too terrified and humiliated to say anything to her mother, Rebecca cried and cried that night from shame, fear and emotions she could not even identify.

It happened several times. Though she tried desperately to not be in the house alone or to stop him when he came, he was much stronger than she; there was little she could do and no one she could tell. It was only a few months later when she felt sick every morning and seemed tired all of the time that her mother noticed the change and began to ask questions. When Rebecca finally told her the truth, her mother realized she must be pregnant. If her father or brothers found out she would be killed. It mattered little that she was an innocent victim. In her culture, the blame would rest solely on the woman as the temptress and seducer.

Rebecca was bundled off to her aunt who lived in a city far away. Though the aunt tried to be kind, Rebecca felt the shame her presence brought on her aunt’s family. She remained in hiding there until the baby was born and immediately taken away. At only fourteen she found herself alone, rejected and forced onto the streets by her aunt’s family, who felt they had completed their duty.

It was so many years ago and in many ways she had come to see these events as God’s grace in her life. If she hadn’t been forced from her family she would never have met the Christian mission where she found shelter, received an education and, most importantly, heard the gospel and met her loving Saviour.

As she opened her front door, her mind snapped back to the present. This evening’s events somehow left her with many of the same emotions she had felt as a child. Being a woman had made many things difficult in her life. Now it even seemed to be a barrier for using her gifts in the church that she loved. Had God made a mistake when He created her, giving her gifts which now could not be used in the Body? She knew that she would only find help in the Scriptures so, even though she was tired, she opened her Bible to Genesis and asked God to give her the understanding she needed to know His truth.

Lecturette:

We will begin now with Unit 2 of “‘Choosing the Better Part,’ Women in Ministry and Leadership.” This unit is entitled “God’s Perfect Plan for Relating and Working Together”. As you may remember from the summary last unit, or as you might guess, this unit will deal with the picture of creation that we receive by reading Genesis, Chapter 1 and 2. We will study together the creation of this world and discuss God’s perfect intentions when he created us. What did He hope for, what was His plan?

Communion with God / Dominion Over the Earth

As we look through these first few chapters of Genesis it is abundantly clear that mankind was made for two primary purposes or tasks. The first is communion with God, our love relationship with our Father. The second is the task of taking dominion over the earth and overseeing God’s creation or his Kingdom here on earth.

Let us take those two purposes in Chapters 2 and 3 in that order. This Chapter will deal with God’s creation of mankind for his purpose of fellowship with us and how our

relationships with each other were designed to work. Chapter 3 will then deal with the issue of our dominion or rule over God’s creation on earth.

Mankind was created for fellowship with God. It can be argued from Scripture that God needs our fellowship, or at least He desires it. He walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the Garden. Fellowship and communion with God make up one primary purpose for our existence, and that is why sin ultimately is so evil, because it separates us from God.

We find hints throughout the first few chapters of Genesis that men and women are inescapably social because God is inescapably social. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working together. That is our model for relating and working together.

Genesis 1

Let’s begin now with the creation story. We all know Genesis 1. We know what it says, right? We’ve all preached sermons on it. But let’s take a fresh look and **see what it actually says, and what it doesn’t say**. Let’s invite God to open our eyes by praying together first.

“God, all we want to do is see this the way You wrote it and intended us to see it. Let the scales drop from our eyes. Let all of our learning be as dust before You. Let us come to Your feet as children and with fresh eyes. Holy Spirit protect us, guide us. Only Your will, not mine, be done. Amen.”

Answer Box # 1

Stop and read Genesis 1 and 2. Compare the two chapters because they are both different versions of the same story. How are they alike and how are they different

There are many similarities and many differences here. Genesis 1 and 2 both give accounts of creation, don’t they? Genesis 1 gives us the big picture, and Genesis 2 tells the story from a different camera angle, up close and in detail. We will go back and forth between the two as we study these words together over this Unit and Unit 3.

In “Our” image

Genesis 1 really gives us the big picture, the perfect intentions of God—how He meant it to be. Let’s look back at specific verses in Genesis 1 now and consider their meaning.

Answer Box # 2

Read through Genesis 1:26. What did God mean there when He said, “...make man in Our image?”

There are many things in this verse, but when God says, “make man in OUR image,” the plural “our” is referring to the Trinity. We know that all members of the Trinity were present and actively involved in Creation. What does it mean that man and woman were

made in the image of the Trinity? What does that say about our relationships and how we work together?

“Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness...” vs 26. And again in vs 27 it is repeated, “So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them male and female he created them.” Vs. 27. “In our image, in our likeness...in his own image.” Repeated three times we see that men and women are created in the image of God and that image is plural. What an amazing picture that creates of the qualities that we as human beings have, those of the triune God.

What is the Trinity in whose image we are created?

In the beginning, God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit, created. Before that there was only him/them -the triune God. What an amazing Being! Three separate identities united together as one in covenant love. They/he always were and always will be. They share all power and all knowledge yet there is no competition among them. No dominance. No control. Amazing!

Consider this: each one- Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has their own thoughts, emotions and will, yet they act as one. They relate with mutual respect and servant love. They demonstrate how to live and work together in such a way that each one makes significant contributions, without one being less than the other. They each have a purpose, a role and significant functions. They are each responsible to support and make room for the other two. Not one among them is the main player, rather each is designed to be a helpmate for the others.

Now let’s consider their/his plan for us. Together God-Father, Son and Holy Spirit created the heavens and earth....and said “let us make human beings in our image” Gen 1:26. And so was the beginning of our story. He/they made Adam and Eve with separate identities, each with their own thoughts, emotions and will. God built into their design the primary need for a personal relationship with them/him (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) followed by the need for personal relationships with varying degrees of intimacy with other human beings.

God’s mandate to both Adam and Eve was to multiply, fill the earth and to cultivate it. Father, Son and Holy Spirit wanted communities of people throughout the earth who lived and related to each other in ways similar to them/him. They wanted our relationships to be characterized by humility, respect, honor, serving, giving and receiving. This was their/his vision for **all** human relationships, with the husband - wife unit being the most intimate.

How do we understand the Trinity?

Let’s explore these relationships within the Trinity as much as possible. While comprehending or completely understanding the trinity strikes me as somewhat of an oxymoron or impossibility because it is truly a mystery, theologians throughout history have grappled with it. And grappling with it is necessary because developing some understanding of the trinity is critical to pleasing him because it has to do with understanding the very nature of the God in whose image we are made. It is the model that God gives us of relationship and of functioning together to accomplish God’s purposes.

Answer Box #3

Stop now and draw to the best of your ability your understanding of how God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit function together in relationship. In other words if you had to draw a diagram of your understanding of how they relate to each other and work together what does it look like?

For those of us who think in pictures it is helpful to summarize our understanding of how the trinity looks in the best way we can. Probably your diagram looked like one of the ones you will find below, taken from an Appendix in a book by Dr. Kevin Giles called *The Trinity & Subordinationism* published in 2002 by Intervarsity Press. This is portions of “Appendix A Trinitariograms” pages 118-121. This catalogues the classic attempts to diagram the relationships that make up the trinity. Take a look at each of these and read the descriptions, then continue on with the Unit.

APPENDIX A

TRINITARIOGRAMS

Two-dimensional drawings seeking to illustrate a given understanding of the Trinity are limited in their capacity to capture very much of the majesty of the triune God of revelation. Nevertheless, they can be powerful aids to conceptualization. In this appendix I want to present four models of the Trinity expressed in “trinitariograms” to illustrate the different positions we have discussed. These diagrams have only one purpose: to elucidate how the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity may be conceived.

The Hierarchical Model

In this model the Father is “above” the Son, and the Son is “above” the Holy Spirit. Figure 1 captures this understanding of the Trinity whether the hierarchy is understood in ontological terms or functional terms.



Figure 1

The Monarchē Model

In the early church it was commonly thought that the Father alone was the *monarchē*, or the one origin, of the Son and the Holy Spirit; and most Eastern Orthodox theologians today still endorse the *monarchē* view of the Father,

although some now question this idea. Many Western theologians think this way of understanding the Trinity implies a certain priority to the Father, even if the Eastern theologians who embrace the *monarchē* of the Father say they reject the subordination of the Son and the Spirit in being or action. This model of the Trinity may be illustrated by an equilateral triangle with the Father at the apex (figure 2).

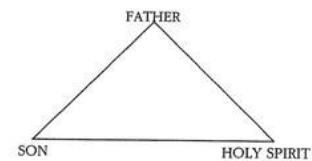


Figure 2

The Filioque Model

When the Western church in 589 added to the Nicene Creed the words *and the Son* (Latin *Filioque*) after the words “the Holy Spirit . . . proceeds from the Father,” the idea that the Father was the sole source (*monarchē*) of the Son and the Spirit was deliberately subverted, if not excluded. Eastern theologians think this model implies the subordination of the Spirit. Western theologians reject this inference, insisting that what it underlines is the equality of the Father and the Son without questioning the equality of the Spirit. This formulation suggests a trinitariogram like figure 3.

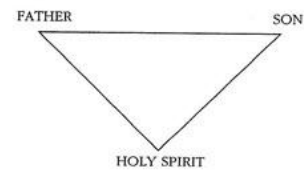


Figure 3

Symmetrical Models

As we have noted, most contemporary theologians, building on the historically orthodox tradition, prefer models of the Trinity that underline the equality of the persons and their communal unity. In the ancient church,

Athanasius came closest to seeing the Trinity in this way. Below I present three trinitariograms that attempt to capture this thought. It is to be noted they all visualize the Trinity in circular imagery.

Wayne Grudem, at the end of his discussion of the Trinity, sets out a number of trinitariograms and surprisingly favors one that is symmetrical.¹ How he equates this with his understanding of a Trinity in which the Father “has the role of commanding, directing and sending” the Son completely escapes me. Figure 4 is his drawing.

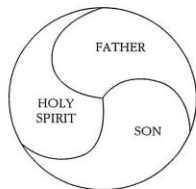


Figure 4

Figure 5 is the drawing I use when speaking on the Trinity. Many have found it helpful.

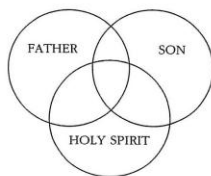


Figure 5

Professor Shirley Guthrie, whose summary of mainline contemporary trinitarianism was quoted in chapter four, offers figure 6.² He envisions the Trinity as

¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), p. 255.
²Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1994), pp. 91–92.

three divine persons dancing joyfully together, hand in hand, in a circle. He advocates this on what he believes is the etymology of the word *perichoresis*, the technical term that speaks of the coinherence of the three persons of the Trinity. In Greek the prefix *peri* (as in *perimeter*) means “around,” and *choreisis* literally means “dancing” (as in *choreography*). This etymology is disputed,³ but the imagery is helpful.⁴ In this imagery the unity of the divine persons is found in their perichoretic communion, and their equality is stressed by allowing that each may take a turn in leading the dance.

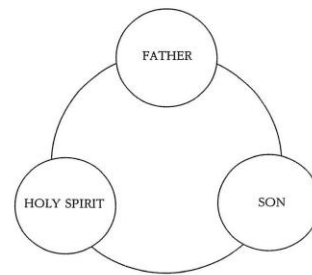


Figure 6

³So Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 170 n. 8; and in more detail, R. Kress, *The Church: Communion, Sacrament, Communication* (New York: Paulist, 1985), pp. 15–22. On the development of this term see Bertrand de Margerie, *The Christian Trinity in History* (Petersham, Mass.: St. Bede, 1982), pp. 182–86.
⁴On this imagery and alternatives, see David Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 180–81.

Each of these diagrams does indicate a clear relationship between three entities that are in fact one as scripture states over and over. But which one is the most accurate portrayal? How they relate to one another is really critical in understanding gender roles.

How does this relate to a biblical understanding of gender roles?

Our understanding of how the members of the trinity relate to one another directly impacts our understanding of how we should all relate to one another within the body of Christ. First of all is simply the heart attitude. The equality and mutuality between Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 and 2 is quickly lost through the sin in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve hide themselves from God breaking that relationship. Then as the fruit is passed from Eve to Adam and Adam blames Eve when called into account by God for the act of sin, that relationship is also broken.

Fortunately through redemption in Jesus a different understanding of relationship is restored, enabled and reinforced throughout the New Testament. Matt 20:25-28 and Gal. 5:13 spell out with wonderful clarity. “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...” “...serve one another humbly in love.” Again the concept of mutuality, service to one another and humility are restored.

Here we can see an accurate reflection of how the members of the Trinity relate to one another and therefore how we are to relate to one another, and yet there is much more. Let’s look together at John 1:1-5 for more insight.

Answer Box #4

Stop and Read John 1:1-5
Who do we understand “the Word” to be? What does this passage tell us about the relationship between God and Jesus?

Fascinating isn’t it? Just verse one is full of such incredible images, Jesus from the beginning having always been—something that in itself is incomprehensible. That he was with God and yet “was” God paints this wonderful word picture that is so beautiful and rich. Through him all things were created and nothing was made without him. In him was life. Over and over, powerful statements of the incredible attributes of Jesus as a member of the Trinity, an equal participant with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the Bible there are many references that clarify that the members of the Trinity are equal and few in this discussion would debate that fact. Yet other things are in debate in the evangelical world today precisely because of the subject of this course about how God sees women and what he created them for.

Equality, Authority, Responsibility and Role

Equality

But this brings us to a very interesting point in looking at gender relationships. Most contemporary Christian leaders today would agree that in the same way that members of the Trinity have equal value, men and women have equal value before God and that both men and women were created in the image of God. This is a uniquely Christian perspective. No other religion in the world sees men and women as equal before God. This is one of the unique attributes of our faith that enables non-Christians to see the character of God as one who is just. It is the characteristic that calls us to respond as Christians to injustices such as abortions of female fetuses when a culture does not value women, or stopping the trafficking of girls for use in prostitution.

Though most Christians are happy to say that women and men have equal value before God, when you look behind that statement you find a range of opinions about just “how equal” women are to men! One of the most interesting debates on this subject is taking place in North America between two groups that both are clearly Evangelical and Bible believing Christians. In spite of these commonalities they understand very differently how men and women relate to one another and therefore by necessity how they see the inner relationships and workings of the Trinity.

The term **Egalitarian** has been used by those on one side of the debate who believe that the Bible does not teach different roles for men and women in marriage or the church that are based on gender alone.

As this relates to the Trinity specifically Egalitarians believe that subordination does not exist eternally within the trinity. And that the best description of the inter-relationships of the Trinity when taking the scripture as a whole is what we stated earlier, each one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has their own thoughts, emotions and will, yet they act as one. They relate with mutual respect and servant love. They demonstrate how to live and work together in such a way that each one makes significant contributions, without one being less than the other. They each have a purpose, a role and significant functions. They are each responsible to support and make room for the other two. Not one among them is the main player and each is to work as a helpmate to the other two.

All of the members of the Trinity have the necessary authority given to them to play the role that is needed and they are equally responsible for the outcomes of their actions.

To better understand the biblical basis for the Egalitarian position as a whole, see CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY: Statement on Men, Women and Biblical Equality attached to this unit as a reading. Also go to the CBE website at <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/free-articles> to read related articles by a number of leading Evangelical authors who agree with this position.

The group on the other side of this debate in the US Evangelical world has chosen to call themselves “**Complementarians**”. Their view is that men and women are equal and different—equal in value and personhood, but different in roles in marriage and the church. Specifically they say that,

“Just as the father and Son are equal in deity and equal in all their attributes, but different in role, so husband and wife are equal in personhood and value, but they are different in the roles God has given them. Just as God the Son is eternally subject to the authority of God the Father, so God has planned that wives be subject to the authority of their husbands.” (Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth, by Dr. Wayne Grudem, 2004 Multnomah Publishers, page 47.)

In this position women and men are stated as being equal in value but not equal in authority or allowed to serve in particular roles based on their gifts and calling taking up their individual responsibilities as believers. Rather based on gender alone certain roles are either open or closed to them. These views are represented by authors such as Dr. Wayne Grudem who has written a number of books specifically on this subject.

To the authors of this course, the Complementarian position sounds troublingly similar to that of the church in South Africa during the Apartheid years, or of the Southern church in the United States during the early 1900’s. In both those cases theologians built an air-tight theology around the doctrine of “separate but equal” for those of different races, based on whether they were black or white. These disturbingly similar arguments attribute to God qualities of injustice that have since been seen clearly for what they are in South Africa and in the South of the USA.

Even more troubling is attributing to the Trinity an internal hierarchy based on Jesus and the Holy Spirit not holding equal authority with Father. The logic is that because Jesus is subject to the Father he has only a certain role to play. In the same way women have less authority than men and therefore can only play certain roles.

Answer Box #5

Stop at this point and re-read the prior statement by Dr. Grudem and then draw a diagram of the Trinity based on his statement.

How it is possible to be equal yet not have equal authority and responsibility is quite an intriguing position. One must reinterpret the very essence of the Trinity as a hierarchical structure to uphold this perspective.

Traditional Understanding of the Trinity

Fortunately we are not alone in this modern debate for understanding the Trinity and the roles of women and men. There is a long line of great minds and sincere theologians who have written down for us their understanding.

As Dr. Kevin Giles states in the attached article in the “Readings” section of this unit, “Evangelicals both in support of the eternal subordination of the Son and those vehemently opposed to the eternal subordination of the Son are in complete agreement that tradition—how the Scriptures have been understood by the best of theologians across the centuries—is a good guide to the proper interpretation of scripture: it is a secondary authority.”

Let’s stop and read more about what tradition can teach us on this subject.

Answer Box #6

Stop and read the article by Kevin Giles at the end of this section, then list 3 to 5 things you learned from that article that surprised you or that were new to you from the writings of these traditional theologians.

Summary—What do we know—Equal in Value and Authority to accept Responsibility to Serve

By reading what tradition has to teach us in this area of understanding the Trinity we find the overwhelming weight of tradition sees the members of the Trinity as equal in value and authority. They all have existed together from the beginning and mysteriously participated together in creation. Now they continue to function together and will do so throughout eternity ruling and reigning as God. They play different roles at different times, and when playing those roles they hold the needed authority for that role and also carry the appropriate responsibility for that role.

It is easy to see the danger in “making a scriptural case” for any single position. One side on this subject, points to all the passages where members of the Godhead are called equal (Philippines 2:6, John 1:1, John 10:30, John 14:9, etc.) While the other side points to the abundance of passages where Jesus talks of his humble stance as compared to the Father, as one sent, in submission to, and so forth (John 14:28, John 4:34, I Corinthians 11:, etc) In the later instance, those making this case never point out that all of those passages relate only to Jesus in his incarnated state.

Rather than entering a Bible verse throwing frenzy it seems much wiser in cases where there is arguably a good biblical basis for either position to back away slowly and look at the bigger picture. In this case, after reading this article, we see that the weight of Church history and tradition supports the Egalitarian perspective of the Trinity as equal members in value and authority while doing different tasks with no member eternally subordinated to another. To do less would take us down a dangerous path to reducing members of the Trinity to less than fully God.

As we said before God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, relate with mutual respect and servant love. They demonstrate how to live and work together in such a way that each one makes significant contributions, without one being less than the other. They each have a purpose, a role and significant functions. They are each responsible to support and make room for the other two. Not one among them is the main player, rather all of them serve as helpmates to one another.

This then is our model for what being created in the image of God looks like as we try to relate in a holy and perfect way to each other. Of course different people play different roles giving them different levels of authority at certain times. But those roles are not based solely on gender or race or some other physical characteristic. They are based on gifting,

calling, and need. As members of the Trinity equally carry the responsibility of the Godhead, men and women equally carry the responsibility for dominion over the earth.

Modernity versus Post-modernity

To try and overlay a hierarchy onto the Trinity rather than express it in terms of a swirling, interacting, interpenetrating body that is mutually submissive in authority, and equal in value is arguably a modern cultural phenomena. It can be seen as one last and rather desperate, rational attempt to humanly put God in a box and make him less than he is in terms of his character and attributes. This is truly frightening when we think about reflecting him accurately in our world today.

One of the great challenges to Christianity for the last 100 years or more has been the rise of rationalism. Ushered in by the Industrial Revolution, the age of science and reason promised to solve every human problem and explain every mystery. To some, God seemed like an unnecessary “fairy tale” now that we had “advanced” and could explain away the supernatural. This has been summarized by many as the “modern” age.

One of the positive attributes of the Western world’s current state of post-modernity has been admitting how much we do not know. Accepting again that faith in an unseen God of the Bible is a mystery in many ways. It has included reasserting the basic questions and seeking for the reality of the supernatural. Accepting easily that not everything can be explained rationally is an attribute of today’s young people. Arriving at this conclusion is finally catching up with what most in the developing world have always understood—the supernatural is alive and well and functioning within our world.

Accepting that there is mystery in the Trinity is only accepting that we cannot possibly understand in our own humanity how the three can be one, functioning in a harmony that does not require eternal subordination. Do they play different roles at times, that require them to submit, humble themselves, become slaves and servants and fulfill different functions? Of course!

I believe that accepting a supernatural element to gender relationships, if they are to truly reflect the trinity, is essential. Because understanding how men and women can function in harmony using their God given gifts to serve and enable one another to fulfill our callings under God without strife and struggle for power and control, is nearly impossible for us as human beings—outside of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Human history testifies to this. Yet the Trinity holds up a standard that acts like a mirror in our daily lives, revealing our short comings while encouraging us with its supernatural implications of fulfilling this calling to live in His image.

Genesis 2

We began this Unit in Genesis 1 but before we leave this Unit, let’s look at some of the things that Genesis 2 shows us about relationships. Let’s explore a bit how the Genesis 2 account of creation informs us about how mankind was designed to relate to one another and to God.

Answer Box #7

Stop and read Genesis 2, then answer this question. Why did God create woman?

Quite simply we find the answer for this in verse 18, “It is not good for the man to be alone...” Something was wrong, was incomplete, was “not good” about man being alone. As we have seen God is not alone and has never been alone and so in making man in “our”

image, it could not be right for man to be alone. But let’s look closer at exactly what it is that God creates so that man will not be alone.

Answer Box # 8

Read Genesis 2:18-20, then answer the following question. What do you believe God meant by a “helper?”

What do you understand “helper” to mean here? I was taught that “helper” meant “servant,” someone inferior. BUT it actually means “partner.” Looking at the Hebrew, the words for “helper” here mean “one to help the helpless or one who needs help.” There is no suggestion of submission or servant but rather an adequate strong partner to pull half the weight, of similar and equal ability.

The same Hebrew word is only used eighteen other times in the Old Testament according to Bible scholars. Fifteen of those eighteen times it is used to refer to God as the helper (the other three refer to man as an ineffectual helper) i.e. David said, “my help comes from the Lord,” or Psalms 30:10; 115:10; 146:5; Exodus 18:4 etc. Each time it is used to refer to help coming from a superior strength. Keep in mind this is the same word God chose to use to describe Eve.

Eve was designed for relationship with Adam because it was not good for him to be alone. She was designed to work with him, to provide help and as we’ve seen already in Genesis 1:26 – 28 rule and reign with him.

Creation “Order”

While we are looking at the creation passages, let’s turn to another commonly discussed issue here, the issue of the “order of creation.” I won’t give much time to this issue, but it is important to at least mention it. Some use the fact that man was created before women to denote the fact he is superior, primary and designed to rule over women. If this was truly the case, this would seem to be in conflict with the dominion mandate God gives man and woman together in Genesis 1:28, which we will look at closely below.

Some say that Genesis 2:18-24 is in conflict with Genesis 1: 26-29 and reflects a different order—that man and woman were not created at the same time. This is actually used by non-Christians to point out that Genesis is, in fact, mythology and not the inspired Word of God.

Trying to build a theological presumption about woman’s place based on the creation order here is difficult to substantiate in the rest of Scripture. Occasionally Paul is quoted from 1 Corinthians 11:3 to confirm this theory; however, Paul nullified any broad theory about superiority or hierarchy later in the same passage, 1 Corinthians 11: 11-12, “However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman and all things originate from God.” (More on Paul in Unit 4)

Several Bible scholars look at this subject, though one I believe that is clearest comes from Charles Trombley in his book *Who Said Women Can’t Teach?* 1985 Bridge Publishing, Inc., page 78.

“The teaching of feminine submission and masculine authority and headship aren’t found in Genesis before the fall except where an interpreter forces them into the context. Without these assumptions, there isn’t anything in Genesis 2:18 that says the woman was created to serve her husband, as the rabbis taught.

It seems more in keeping with the scriptural revelation we have of God’s impartial nature that God would give man a fellow co-worker, a co-regent to rule with

him, an associate with full rights and privileges, also made in the likeness and image of God. The man and woman supplemented and fulfilled each others’ needs. God gave the commands and made the decisions, and together Adam and Eve fulfilled them.”

Although some would make a case for a woman being inferior to man based solely on the fact that man was created first, there seems to be little in the rest of Scripture to substantiate that idea.

Forgiveness

Before we can close this unit, there is one critical topic that we must discuss if we are to have any hope of relating and working together as God would have us do, and that is the subject of forgiveness. All of us as Christians know that we cannot relate well to one another when we have anything between us that is unforgiven. We know we are supposed to forgive those who hurt us and we also know that if we do something wrong to someone else we are supposed to tell them we are sorry and ask for forgiveness.

Those are simple principles, right? We can even quote some of the scriptures that tell us this, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you,” (Col. 3:13) How many times are we supposed to forgive? “...up to seven times seventy.” (Matt 18:21, 22) The Bible is literally full of discussions on forgiveness.

The problem is however, that forgiving is much easier to talk about than it is to do. Oh, it is not so hard when it’s a small thing, an accident or something similar, to forgive the other person. But what about the situation that we read about with Rebecca in our story for this unit? What about the intentional ongoing violent abuse that many women face daily in this world? Are they supposed to forgive? Are we supposed to forgive?

A huge proportion of women have suffered some type of abuse and usually men are the perpetrators. The statistics are staggering. Maybe it is something as small as jokes being told about how helpless women are, or that they are the source of all evil in the world. Maybe it wasn’t something aimed at you personally, but rather just growing up in a culture or church that values males more than females and shows that by the way boys are given preference in everyday life. Maybe it’s something as serious as ongoing physical and sexual abuse. The greater the evil, the more potent the effect, but for every woman who has faced any suffering simply for being a woman there is pain and damage.

That pain and damage can have many different kinds of results. Often a woman develops a poor self-image. Sometimes she experiences the feeling that she deserves this abuse she’s receiving because she really is evil or ugly or unlovable. Whatever the pain and whatever the feelings one result is certain; it becomes more difficult to truly believe that God loves you and wants to use you in things important to His Kingdom.

Answer Box # 9

Stop and turn to Matthew 6:14, 15 and then to the parable in Matthew 18:21—35. Read through those passages and summarize what God says about forgiveness.

The incredible truth from this passage is that simply put, until you can truly forgive those who hurt you, you cannot believe God’s truth about you. Part of the reason is that God says He cannot forgive you for your sins until you forgive others. This is an incredibly crucial truth. When we forgive others, it releases God’s forgiving power in our lives. The result is cleansing and seeing ourselves the way God sees us as the beautiful, holy, and powerful

creatures He has created us to be. Without it we become more emotionally crippled and bitter.

I taught on this subject of women in leadership several times before it dawned on me how important this area of forgiveness is to understanding and grasping biblical truth about women. After a friend shared on forgiveness at a conference where we were speaking, a woman came up to her afterwards and asked for prayer. As a young woman growing up, several men in her family had taken advantage of her, raped her and frightened her into not telling anyone. Now as an adult and married woman she found that she still hated these men and in fact most men, but she couldn’t escape contact with them. They were relatives, and every holiday season when the family gathered together, there they were in her home and expecting her to extend hospitality to them. She wanted to stop hating but she didn’t know how. Unfortunately that story is very common even among Christian women from Christian families.

It is incredibly important that we forgive those who have hurt us. It is also incredibly important that we ask forgiveness of those we have hurt. We need to forgive and be forgiven in order for our spirits to take in the truth of this study on women.

I’d like us to stop right here for a few minutes and give you the opportunity to invite the Holy Spirit to do some healing in each of our lives. This is such an incredibly painful area that truthfully we cannot do this without the help of the Holy Spirit. For those who have been abusers and are sorry for what you’ve done, ask God to cleanse and heal that sin from your life one final time. For those who have been victims of any kind of abuse or pain, ask God to enable you to forgive those who hurt you.

Answer Box # 10

Stop now and take time to pray either on your own, or even better pray with someone else you can trust. Ask God to search your heart. For those who have been abusers, or in any way may have hurt women even by something so small as a disparaging comment or joke, and are sorry for what you’ve done, ask God to cleanse and heal that sin from your life one final time. For those who have been victims of any kind of abuse or pain, ask God to enable you to forgive those who hurt you. This is something you cannot possibly do without His help.

I want to encourage you that only through the supernatural help of the Holy Spirit can you truly forgive someone who has hurt you. You cannot do this on your own. BUT the good news is that if you are willing and open, God will enable you to forgive. It may not be easy and it may be a process that takes some time, but He will be faithful.

If you have been the victim of abuse, I want to encourage you to take the time to seek help and get counsel and get free from this pain and burden. God is faithful and loving. Don’t give up until God enables you to truly forgive. It releases healing, forgiveness and the ability to understand God’s word on this subject. It enables you to understand how God truly sees you.

For any man who has been an abuser of women, the stakes are equally high. You must seek forgiveness from those you have hurt and ask God for forgiveness. Only then will you be able to forgive yourself. Only then will you be able to see women the way God sees them.

Below is your final assignment. Prayerfully ask God to help you to see his perspective as you complete it.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. *Where are the Trinitarian relational attributes described in this unit (copied below) :*
 - a. *visible or not visible in your organizational relationships? State specific examples and explain in 2 pages or less.*
 - b. *Visible or not visible in your marriage? State specific examples and explain in 2 pages or less.*

Trinitarian relational attributes:

“... each one—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, has their own thoughts, emotions and will, yet they act as one. They relate with mutual respect and servant love. They demonstrate how to live and work together in such a way that each one makes significant contributions, without one being less than the other. They each have a purpose, a role and significant functions. They are each responsible to support and make room for the other two. Not one among them is the main player, rather all of them serve as helpmates to one another.”

Readings

*CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY:
Statement on Men, Women and Biblical Equality*

Men, Women and Biblical Equality

The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption (Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, 5:1-2; 1Cor 11:11-12; Gal 3:13, 28, 5:1).

The Bible teaches that God has revealed Himself in the totality of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God (Matt 5:18; John 10:35; 2Tim 3:16; 2Peter 1:20-21). We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted holistically and thematically. We also recognize the necessity of making a distinction between inspiration and interpretation: inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture.

Biblical Truths

Creation

1. The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God's image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen 1:26-28).
2. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word "helper" (*ezer*), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (e.g. 1Sam 7:12; Ps 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.
3. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20 the word "suitable" (*kenegdo*) denotes equality and adequacy.
4. The Bible teaches that man and woman were co-participants in the Fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12-21; 1Cor 15:21-22).
5. The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

Redemption

6. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; 2Cor 5:17; Gal 3:26-28).

Community

7. The Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells women and men, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1Cor 12:7, 11, 14:31).
8. The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority (Acts 1:14, 18:26, 21:9; Rom 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15; see also Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2Chron 34:22-28; Prov 31:30-31; Micah 6:4).
9. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1Cor 11:5; 1Peter 2:9-10; Rev 1:6, 5:10). Therefore, the few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom of women must not be interpreted simplistically and in contradiction to the rest of

Scripture, but their interpretation must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their total context (1Cor 11:2-16, 14:33-36; 1Tim 2:9-15).

10. The Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them (Matt 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal 5:13; 1Peter 5:2-3).

Family

11. The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility (1Cor 7:3-5; Eph 5:21; 1Peter 3:1-7; Gen 21:12). The husband's function as "head" (*kephale*) is to be understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:19; 1Peter 3:7).

12. The Bible teaches that both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in the nurture, training, discipline and teaching of their children (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 6:6-9, 21:18-21, 27:16; Prov 1:8, 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20; 2Tim 1:5; see also Luke 2:51).

Application

Community

1. In the church, spiritual gifts of women and men are to be recognized, developed and used in serving and teaching ministries at all levels of involvement: as small group leaders, counselors, facilitators, administrators, ushers, communion servers, and board members, and in pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and worship.

In so doing, the church will honor God as the source of spiritual gifts. The church will also fulfill God's mandate of stewardship without the appalling loss to God's kingdom that results when half of the church's members are excluded from positions of responsibility.

2. In the church, public recognition is to be given to both women and men who exercise ministries of service and leadership.

In so doing, the church will model the unity and harmony that should characterize the community of believers. In a world fractured by discrimination and segregation, the church will dissociate itself from worldly or pagan devices designed to make women feel inferior for being female. It will help prevent their departure from the church or their rejection of the Christian faith.

Family

3. In the Christian home, husband and wife are to defer to each other in seeking to fulfill each other's preferences, desires and aspirations. Neither spouse is to seek to dominate the other but each is to act as servant of the other, in humility considering the other as better than oneself. In case of decisional deadlock they should seek resolution through biblical methods of conflict resolution rather than by one spouse imposing a decision upon the other.

In so doing, husband and wife will help the Christian home stand against improper use of power and authority by spouses and will protect the home from wife and child abuse that sometimes tragically follows a hierarchical interpretation of the husband's "headship."

4. In the Christian home, spouses are to learn to share the responsibilities of leadership on the basis of gifts, expertise, and availability, with due regard for the partner most affected by the decision under consideration.

In so doing, spouses will learn to respect their competencies and their complementarity. This will prevent one spouse from becoming the perennial loser, often forced to practice ingratiating or deceitful manipulation to protect self-esteem. By establishing their marriage on a partnership basis, the couple will protect it from joining the tide of dead or broken marriages resulting from marital inequities.

5. In the Christian home, couples who share a lifestyle characterized by the freedom they find in Christ will do so without experiencing feelings of guilt or resorting to hypocrisy. They are freed to emerge from an unbiblical "traditionalism" and can rejoice in their mutual

accountability in Christ.

In so doing, they will openly express their obedience to Scripture, will model an example for other couples in quest of freedom in Christ, and will stand against patterns of domination and inequality sometimes imposed upon church and family.

We believe that biblical equality as reflected in this document is true to Scripture.

We stand united in our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating Word that provides the most effective way for women and men to exercise the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit and thus to serve God.

Gilbert Bilezikian
W. Ward Gasque
Stanley N. Gundry
Gretchen Gaebelein Hull
Catherine Clark Kroeger
Jo Anne Lyon
Roger Nicole

Endorsed by: Miriam Adeney, Astri T. Anfindsen, Timothy Paul Allen, James Alsdurf, Phyllis Alsdurf, John E. Anderson, Patricia W. Anderson, Carl E. Armerding, Myron S. Augsburg, Raymond Bakke, Sandra Bauer, James Beck, Virginia L. Beck, Elizabeth Bell, Roy D. Bell, David G. Benner, Gordon C. Bennett, Joyce R. Berggren, Char Binkley, Sandra Bostian, Mark A. Brewer, Bettie Ann Brigham, D. Stuart Briscoe, Kathleen K. Brogan, James A. Brooks, Beth E. Brown, H. Marie Brown, F. F. Bruce, Cheever C. Buckbee, David H. Burr, Donald P. Buteyn, Anthony Campolo, Linda Cannell, Daniel R. Chamberlain, Caroline L. Cherry, Jack M. Chisholm, Gerald Christmas, Rosemary Christmas, David K. Clark, Shirley Close, Bonnidell Clouse, Robert G. Clouse, David W. Clowney, Naomi C. Cole, Mark O. Coleman, Jim Conway, Sally Conway, Kaye V. Cook-Kollars, C. S. Cowles, R. Byron Crozier, Peter H. Davids, Edward R. Dayton, Paul H. De Vries, Sidney De Waal, J. Jey Deifell, Jr., John R. Dellenback, Mary Jane Dellenback, Gary W. Demarest, Dolores Dunnett, Walter Dunnett, Charlotte Dyck, James F. Engel, C. Stephen Evans, Colleen Townsend Evans, Louis Evans, Gabriel Fackre, Gordon D. Fee, John Fischer, Patrice Fischer, David B. Fletcher, Joan D. Flikkema, David A. Fraser, Nils C. Friberg, Donn M. Gaebelein, Kevin Giles, Alfred A. Glenn, Barbara R. Glenn, Arthur A. Goetze, Tita V. Gordovez, Lillian V. Grissen, H. James Groen, Vernon Grounds, Darrell L. Guder, Lee M. Haines, Robin Haines, Richard C. Halverson, Sandra Hart, Stephen A. Hayner, Jo Ellen Heil, Betty C. Henderson, Robert T. Henderson, John J. Herzog, Bartlett L. Hess, I. John Hesselink, Roberta Hestenes, Janet S. Hickman, Marvin D. Hoff, Colleen Holby, Arthur F. Holmes, Beverly Holt, Carol D. C. Howard, David Allan Hubbard, M. Gay Hubbard, Anne Huffman, John Huffman, Philip G. Hull, Sanford D. Hull, Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., William J. Hybels, Vida S. Icenogle, Dorothy Irvin, Evelyn Jensen, Alan F. Johnson, David W. Johnson, Robert K. Johnston, Rufus Jones, Kenneth S. Kantzer, Robert D. Kettering, John F. Kilner, Herbert V. Klem, Richard C. Kroeger, Harold E. Kurtz, Pauline H. Kurtz, Bruce Larson, Michael R. Leming, William H. Leslie, Arthur H. Lewis, Walter L. Liefeld, Zondra Lindblade, Helen W. Loeb, Richard N. Longenecker, Richard F. Lovelace, Deborah Olsoe Lunde, Kenneth H. Maahs, Faith M. Martin, James R. Mason, Alice P. Mathews, Dolores E. McCabe, Terry McGonigal, David L. McKenna, Lois McKinney, William A. Meyer, Hazel M. Michelson, A. Berkeley Mickelsen, Alvera Mickelsen, Eileen F. Moffett, Samuel H. Moffett, C. Sue Moore, Edward Moore, Graham Morbey, Mary Leigh Morbey, Elizabeth Morgan, Stephen C. Mott, Richard J. Mouw, Jeana Nieporte, William M. Nieporte, Alvaro L. Nieves, Arnold T. Olson, Daisy M. Washburn Osborn, LaDonna Osborn, T. L. Osborn, Grant R. Osborne, Grace Paddon, John Paddon, Elizabeth L. Patterson, Virginia Patterson, Richard Patterson, Jr., Philip Barton Payne, Robert W. Pazmino, Janet M. Peifer, William J. Petersen, Richard V.

Unit 2 “God’s Perfect Plan for His Creation”

Pierard, Paul E. Pierson, Carolyn Goodman Plampin, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Christiane Posselt, Quah Cheng Hock, Robert V. Rakestraw, Sara Robertson, Lianne Roembke, Lydia M. Sarandan, Alvin J. Schmidt, Richard C. Schoenert, David M. Scholer, Jeannette F. Scholer, Robert A. Seiple, Ronald J. Sider, Lewis B. Smedes, James D. Smith III, Paul R. Smith, P. Paul Snezek, Jr., Klyne Snodgrass, Howard A. Snyder, Aida B. Spencer, William D. Spencer, Adele O. Sullivan, W. Nelson Thomson, Ruth A. Tucker, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, Joseph W. Viola, Virginia G. Viola, Emily Walther, George H. Walther, Patricia A. Ward, Timothy Weber, Van B. Weigel, Bruce Wilson, Earle L. Wilson, H. C. Wilson, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Linda R. Wright, Walter C. Wright, Jr., Louis H. Zbinden. (9/95)

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The Doctrine of the Trinity and Subordination
by Kevin N. Giles

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the doctrine of the Trinity captured the attention of theologians more than any other doctrine.¹ At no time in history since the theologically stormy days of the fourth century has there been so much discussion on this topic, and the discussion does not seem to be ending! Books on the Trinity by Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox theologians continue to be published as I write. No longer is it thought that the Trinity is an obtuse, secondary, and impractical dogma. Today theologians are generally agreed that this doctrine is foundational to the Christian faith because it articulates what is most distinctive in the biblical revelation of God—he is triune.

The discussion in the last thirty years has ranged far and wide, but it may be said with some confidence that conceptualizing the Trinity as a *perichoretic* (interpenetrating) community of three “persons”² who work in perfect unity and harmony has been to the fore. This model of the Trinity highlights the profound unity and the personal distinction within the Trinity without using abstract philosophical terms. It also excludes tritheism, modalism, and subordinationism, the three great Trinitarian heresies. The last of these, subordinationism, has been particularly under assault. Ted Peters says that if anything, contemporary mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic trinitarian thinking is “antissubordinationist.”³

Paradoxically in this same period, many evangelical theologians have been moving in the opposite direction. Since the 1980s, evangelicals wishing to uphold the idea of male headship (understood as authoritative leadership) in the church and the home have been arguing that the Son is *eternally* subordinated to the Father like women are to men. Most speak only of an *eternal* subordination in role/function for the Son. However some evangelicals honestly admit that eternal role subordination by necessity implies subordination in person or being.⁴ Conservative evangelicals who speak of the eternal subordination of the Son quote Paul’s assertion that God the Father is the “head of Christ” just as “man is the head of woman” (1 Cor. 11:3), and the texts that speak of the Son being “sent” by the Father (Jn. 4:34, 5:30, etc.), and obeying the Father (Rom. 5:18-19; Heb. 5:8). In addition, they claim that the eternal subordination of the Son is historic orthodoxy. We are told that this is the teaching of Athanasius, Augustine, Calvin, and various other theologians, as well as the creeds.

What should we believe?

For all evangelicals, the Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of doctrine and practice. However, in the ongoing debate concerning how the doctrine of the Trinity should best be formulated, *how to interpret the scriptures* on this matter has been the foundational issue.

Subordinationists (those who insist on the eternal and personal subordination of the Son and the Spirit in being and/or function)⁵ appeal to the texts that seem to subordinate the Son to the Father while non-subordinationists appeal to the texts that would seem to affirm the equality of the Father and the Son along with the Holy Spirit. If there were no way to settle this debate over the interpretation of the Bible, we would have a stalemate. Each side could simply go on quoting their proof texts and no resolution would be possible.

But this is not the case. Evangelicals both in support of the eternal subordination of the Son and those vehemently opposed to the eternal subordination of the Son are in complete agreement that *tradition*—how the Scriptures have been understood by the best of theologians across the centuries—is a good guide to the proper interpretation of scripture: it is a secondary authority. Both sides claim the theological luminaries of the past and the creeds are on their side. The resolution of the debate therefore lies in determining whose reading of the scriptures is most faithful to the tradition.

The New Testament

The first Christians were forced to rethink the doctrine of God they had inherited from Judaism because of Jesus’ ministry, death, resurrection, and the subsequent giving of the Holy Spirit. As Jews, they were convinced that there is but one God, a truth Jesus himself affirmed (Mk. 12:29-32; cf. 1 Cor. 8:4; Eph. 4:6; James 2:19). This ruled out *tritheism*—three separate gods. Nevertheless, they were also convinced that in some way Jesus and the Holy Spirit made the one God present. For this reason, they frequently associated the Father, Son, and Spirit together, implying their equality (cf. Mt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 4:4-6; etc.), and on occasions spoke of Jesus as *Theos* (Jn. 1:1, 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8), calling him “the Lord” (the title for Yahweh used in the Greek OT) some two hundred times. From these New Testament texts we see that the first Christians no longer thought of God as a simple mathematical unitary entity. He was in some way triune. Somehow, these two seemingly opposing ideas had to be held: God is one and God is three. The New Testament writers agree on this, but they give few insights as to how this might be so or how it might be explained.

Modalism

One of the first suggestions as to how God might be three and one at the same time was that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were merely successive *modes of revelation* of the one God. This answer upheld the biblical truth that God is one, but it undermined the eternal distinct existence of the three divine persons, which the Bible also teaches. This error, which was called *modalism*, was rejected by the church Fathers, as it has been by subsequent orthodox theologians down to our day. It is believed that to be loyal to biblical revelation the doctrine of the Trinity must affirm without equivocation the unity of God and the eternal *and* personal coexistence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Subordinationism

Another early suggestion made by many second and early third century theologians who were opposed to modalism was that God the Father, a Monad, is God in the fullest sense, the Son is the *Logos* or Word of God always in the Father who was brought forth for creation and redemption.⁶ They stressed that the Son and the Spirit were fully divine persons, but this *Logos* model of the Trinity, while safeguarding the unity of God and excluding modalism, implied that the Son and the Spirit were secondary and tertiary subordinates to the one true God.

To exclude the problems this reading of Scripture raised, Catholic theologians from the time of Athanasius, on the basis of a deeper reflection on Scripture, began with the belief that God is not a solitary Monad who begat the Son and the Spirit in time, but is a Tri-unity of three equal divine persons from all eternity. This was a revolutionary breakthrough in theological method. This profound insight Athanasius used to counter Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria, who earlier in the fourth century went a step further than the second century naive subordinationists and actually argued that God the Father alone was the true God: the Son and the Spirit were lesser gods, different in being/nature/essence from the one true God. In making this assertion, Arius began a theological “school,” known as Arianism which, despite significant variations among its members, involved certain characteristic ideas.

According to Professor R.P.C. Hanson in his definitive book on Arianism, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, the first and most important of these was ontological subordinationism—the subordination of the Son (and the Spirit) in his being/nature/essence. This observation comes as no surprise, for most know that ontological subordinationism was of the essence of Arianism. What is of some surprise to many is that for the Arians, this ontological subordinationism *always* had as its corollary the eternal functional subordination of the Son. The Arians believed that the human traits seen in the incarnate Son were proof that he was less than the Father, a creature, a “sort of vulnerable God.”⁷ They made much of his ignorance of certain facts, tiredness, prayer life, and

suffering, and in particular they highlighted his sending by, and obedience to, the Father. Hanson says the Arians consistently taught that the Son “does the Father’s will and exhibits *obedience* and *subordination* to the Father, and adores and praises the Father, not only in his earthly ministry but also in Heaven.”⁸ The Arians began with a Greek view of God who could have no contact with matter, let alone with human flesh, but their proof of the ontological subordination of the Son was based on many biblical texts that either seemed to subordinate the Son, or actually did subordinate him in some way. In other words, they found proof of what they already believed by appeal to the Bible. Most of the texts quoted alluded to the Son’s human characteristics and servant form seen in his incarnation. They argued that this biblical teaching spoke not only of the incarnate Son’s relationship with his Father while on earth, but also of his eternal relationship with his Father in heaven.

Although Arianism was basically a fourth-century phenomenon, subordinationism is a perennial threat to the life of the church. It is the most common of the three classic trinitarian errors.⁹ In almost every century, there have been those who have argued in one way or another that the Son is eternally subordinated to the Father.¹⁰ Calvin battled with such people in the sixteenth century; they flourished both on the continent and in England in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, Charles Hodge, the staunchly reformed professor of theology at Princeton Seminary in the United States, taught, “In the Holy Trinity there is a subordination of the Persons (of the Son and the Spirit) as to the mode of their subsistence (i.e. personal existence) and operation” (i.e. work/function/role).¹¹ And in the last thirty years, as was noted at the beginning of this article, subordinationism has become common among contemporary conservative evangelicals committed to the permanent subordination of women.

It has to be admitted that there are texts in the Bible that can be quoted, and Arius and his followers found every one of them, to support the *eternal* subordination of the Son. Jesus himself once said, “The Father is greater than I” (Jn. 14:28), and the scriptures speak of him being “sent” (Jn. 4:34; 5:30 etc.), and obeying the Father (Rom. 5:18-19; Heb. 5:8). What has to be asked is, how do these texts relate to the texts that speak of the Son as God (Jn. 1:1, 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Heb. 1:8), or as the Lord—the title used of *Yahweh* in the Greek Old Testament (Acts 2:21; Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:2—more than 200 times), or as equal with God (Phil. 2:6), or as “head over all things” (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10)? This tension in the texts called for a hermeneutic that could make sense of the whole, without rejecting any of the parts.¹²

Athanasius’ Reply to the Arians

Arianism posed the greatest threat to Christianity that had arisen to this point of time. If Jesus the Son of God is not God in human form, then he did not perfectly reveal the Father, and he could not save, for only God can save. In this critical hour, God raised up one of the greatest theologians of all times, St. Athanasius (296-373 AD).¹³ His grasp of the whole of Scripture was profound and his theological acumen far exceeded that of his adversaries.

In reply to the Arians’ appeal to the Bible, Athanasius argued that they had failed to grasp the whole “scope” of scripture and failed to recognize that Scripture gives a “double account” of the Son of God—one of his temporal and voluntary subordination in the incarnation, the other of his eternal divine status.¹⁴ On this basis he argued that texts that spoke of the divinity of the Son and of his equality with the Father pointed to his *eternal* status and dignity, and texts that spoke of the subordination of the Son pointed to his *voluntary and temporal* subordination necessitated by him becoming man for our salvation. For Athanasius, the Son is *eternally one in being* with the Father, *temporally and voluntarily* subordinate in his incarnate ministry. Athanasius had no problems with the many texts that spoke of the Son’s frailty, prayer life, obedience, or death on the cross. For him these texts affirmed unambiguously the Son’s full human nature temporally and voluntarily assumed for our salvation. Such human traits, he argued, were not to be read back into the eternal

Trinity.

As part of their case, the Arians claimed that if the Son is “begotten” (they took this to mean created) by the Father, then he must be less than the Father because all human sons are less than their father. In reply to this reasoning, Athanasius first argued that the biblical metaphor of “begetting” when applied to the Son of God did not imply creation. The Bible did not teach that the Son was one of God the Creator’s works, but rather God himself differentiated from the Father by origination. For Athanasius, the Son was “begotten” of the Father, not created by the Father. The terminology of begetting *differentiated* the persons, but did not subordinate the persons. In regard to the Arians’ claim that all sons were less than their human fathers, Athanasius next argued that in fact all sons are *one in being* with their fathers.

A third incredibly important insight into what the Scriptures taught about the persons of the Trinity was made when Athanasius pointed out that in the Bible what God *does* reveals *who God is*—the being of God is made manifest in the works of God. He thus argued that it is because Jesus does what only God can do (raise the dead, heal the sick, forgive sins, offer salvation, reign as Lord and head over all, etc.) that we are to know he is God (cf. Jn. 5:19). So, for Athanasius, in contrast to Arius and his followers, the being/nature/essence and the works/operations/functions of the Father and the Son are one. The three divine persons are one in being and one in action. *Who they are* and *what they do* cannot be separated.

In enunciating this principle, Athanasius perfectly captured biblical thinking. This unity of being and action between the Father, Son, and Spirit, first spelt out by Athanasius, is a constant theme from this point on in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. On this basis it is held that to *eternally* subordinate the Son or the Spirit in work/operation/function by necessity implies their ontological subordination. If one person on the basis of personal identity alone must always take the subordinate role, then he or she must be a subordinated person, less than his or her superior in some way.

Athanasius believed that in the incarnate Son, God was truly present in the world in human form. The texts he quotes most of all are, “The Father and I are one” (Jn. 10:30), and, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). So emphatic was he that the Son was fully God, he repeatedly says, “The same things are said of the Son which are said of the Father, except for calling him Father.”¹⁵

The Cappadocian Fathers

In the later part of Athanasius’ life, his closest and most gifted theological allies were the Cappadocian fathers (three learned theologians who were all born in Cappadocia in Asia Minor) who likewise were totally opposed to subordinating the Son in the eternal Trinity in any way. In thinking about the God revealed in Scripture, they begin not with God the Creator, but with the eternally triune Godhead (*Theotes*).¹⁶ For them, the divine three share at an inter-trinitarian level one being (*ousios*), yet they are eternally three *hypostases*. The *hypostases* could be distinguished but not separated, differentiated but not divided. For them their unity is that of three persons in communion (*koinonia*) and it is so profound that each person interpenetrates the other.¹⁷

Like Athanasius, the Cappadocians not only insisted that all three persons were one in being (*homoousios*) but also that they worked/functioned/operated as one. Oneness in being necessitated oneness in action and vice versa. So Basil wrote:

We perceive the operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to be one and the same, in no respect showing differences or variation; from this identity of operation we necessarily infer the unity of nature.¹⁸

For the Cappadocians, the idea that the Son is eternally obedient, always a servant under the Father, as their chief Arian opponent Eunomius emphatically and repeatedly argued, was a gross error.¹⁹ They take up this matter time and time again. In reply, they insist that in the New Testament, the Son’s servanthood and obedience is limited to the incarnation. Gregory of Nyssa says, “By his partaking of creation he also partook of servitude.”²⁰ Furthermore they argued in the incarnation the Son was representative man.²¹

His obedience countered the disobedience of Adam that had brought ruin to the human race. Again, I quote Gregory of Nyssa who in answering Eunomius points out that “the mighty Paul” says “he [Jesus] became obedient (Phil, 2:8) to accomplish the mystery of redemption by the cross, who had emptied himself by assuming the likeness and fashion of a man ... healing the disobedience of men by his own obedience.”²² For the Cappadocians, the Son’s obedience was not compulsory submission to another’s will, the will of the Father, but rather a coincidence of willing. What the Father wills and what the Son wills are always one. Basil states:

[The Son’s] will is connected in indissoluble union with the Father. Do not let us then understand by what is called a “commandment” a peremptory mandate delivered by organs of speech, and giving orders to the Son, as to a subordinate, concerning what he ought to do. Let us rather in a sense befitting the Godhead, perceive the transmission of will, like the reflection of an object in a mirror, passing without note between the Father and the Son.²³

On this basis, the Cappadocians argued the divine three have but one will. They always work in perfect harmony and unison.

For the Cappadocians, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are differentiated by their differing origins and thus differing relations and nothing else. The Father is “unbegotten,” the Son “begotten” and the Spirit “proceeding.” For them differentiating the persons in this way did not in any way suggest the subordination of the Son or the Spirit. To ensure the unity of the Godhead they spoke of the Father as the “sole source” or “sole origin” (Greek *monarche*) of the being of the Son and the Spirit. In their thinking this too did not imply any subordination whatsoever for the three *hypostases* shared in the one being of the Godhead and each interpenetrated the other. In other words for them, derivation of being did not imply diminution of being, or demotion in authority.

However, in making the Father the *arche*/origin of the being of the Son and the Spirit, many Western theologians think a conceptual weakness was introduced. A certain priority was given to the Father. To simply deny that the *monarche* of the Father envisages the Son and the Spirit standing below the Father does not solve the problem. Eastern Orthodox theologians generally endorse the *monarche* of the Father, denying it implies any hint of subordinationism. Nevertheless in recent times, as an outcome of ecumenical dialogue, some of them have begun speaking, as Athanasius did, of the divine Trinity as the *arche*.²⁴ Like most contemporary theologians, they want to exclude completely subordinationism.

First at the council of Nicea in 325 AD, and then at the council of Constantinople in 381 AD, the idea that the Son was subordinated in his being to the Father was totally rejected. In the Nicene creed, as finally worded at the council of Constantinople, the Son is confessed as one in being (*homoousios*) with the Father.²⁵ In making this theological pronouncement, this creed also pronounced on how the Scriptures should be read. To read back into the eternal Trinity the subordination of the Son seen in the incarnation, the creed rules, is a hermeneutical error.

Augustine and his heirs

Early in the fifth century on the western side of the Roman Empire, another great theologian, Augustine of Hippo gave his mind to restating the doctrine of the Trinity. In his presentation of this doctrine, he begins with the unity of the triune God and then explains how the divine three are distinct “persons.”²⁶ Like Athanasius, he is particularly keen to first establish how the scriptures are to be read correctly—canonically is his word. For him the unequivocal divinity and unity of the three “persons” is the foundational premise. Then, making Philippians 2:4-6 the key to a right reading of Scripture, he insists that all texts that refer to the equality in divinity, majesty, and authority of the Son speak of his eternal status, and all texts that refer to some subordination or frailty speak of his temporal and voluntary

subordination in the incarnation for our salvation.

In Augustine’s work, the emphasis falls on the one substance or being of God. With this starting point, there can be no subordination whatsoever in the Trinity since all three persons “share the inseparable equality of one substance present in divine unity.”²⁷ Because the three persons are one in their inner life, this means that for Augustine their works in the world are one. Particular works could be appropriated to each person (e.g. creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and sanctification to the Spirit) but always the divine three act as one. They work in perfect unison and harmony. Thus he spoke of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as having one will. For this reason, it is an impossibility for Augustine to speak of the Father commanding and the Son obeying as if there could be a conflict of wills within the eternal Trinity.

With his stress on the unity and equality of the three divine persons, Augustine also had to carefully and unambiguously distinguish them to avoid any hint of modalism. He argued that the names “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are designations given to three unchanging and unchangeable relations²⁸ within the Godhead, predicated on differing origination. The Father is distinguished as Father because he “begets” the Son; the Son is distinguished because as the Son he is “begotten;” the Spirit is distinguished from the Father and the Son because he is “bestowed” by them.²⁹ For Augustine, just as with Athanasius and the Cappadocians, differentiating the persons does not imply the subordination of any of the persons. Equality and difference are both fully embraced without reserve.

Augustine thought of the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and the Son and as the communal bond that unites them. This meant that for him the Holy Spirit could not be the Spirit of just one of them but rather of the two in relationship. This theological insight he found in Scripture. He noted that the Bible spoke of the Holy Spirit as both the Spirit of the Son and the Spirit of the Father. The Father *and* the Son must therefore be “the origin,” or “principium” of the Holy Spirit.

It is thus of no surprise to find that at the third council of Toledo in 589 AD the words “and the Son” (these three English words translate one Latin word, *Filioque*) were added to the Nicene Creed which had until that time spoken of the Spirit as proceeding solely “from the Father.” This led to a growing divide between Eastern and Western theologians. The latter generally believe this addition safeguarded the vital truth established in the Nicene creed that the Father and the Son are one in being/substance; it also disallows any disjunction between the Son and the Spirit that would be contrary to Scripture where the Spirit can be called either “the Spirit of God” or “the Spirit of Jesus” (Acts 16:7; cf. Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6). This addition was not intended to subordinate the Spirit to the Father and the Son, but it must be admitted that the Eastern Orthodox objection that it does just this, at least conceptually, cannot be ignored. After Augustine’s death his model of the Trinity was encapsulated in the so-called, Athanasian Creed (Athanasius was long dead when it was compiled.). This creed stresses the unity of the Trinity and the equality of the persons. It ascribes equal divinity, majesty, and authority to all three persons. “Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Spirit.” All three are said to be “almighty” and “Lord” (no subordination in authority); “none is before or after another (no hierarchical ordering); none is greater, or less than another (no subordination in being or nature) ... all three are co-equal.” The Son is only “inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” A more explicit rejection of the *eternal* subordination of the Son in being, function, or authority is hard to imagine. For those who confess this creed, they are affirming this is what they believe and that this is what the Bible teaches when read correctly.

The great Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century restated and developed Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity. Like Augustine he began with and emphasized the unity of God before he discussed the distinction of the persons. With his stress on the divine unity of the Godhead there can be no subordinationism whatsoever within the eternal or immanent Trinity. Roman Catholic theologians have consistently followed him on this principle. There is not time in this essay to say more on Aquinas but more must be said about Calvin’s teaching on the Trinity because for many evangelicals he is the theologian *par excellence*.

John Calvin

Calvin made several important contributions to the doctrine of the Trinity. Foreshadowing modern developments, he eclectically drew on the best of Eastern and Western Trinitarian thinking, yet seeking always to be faithful to the formulations of this doctrine as it had been passed on. However, as the Bible was his primary authority, he was not adverse to modifying terminology or explanations found in the tradition so that the scriptures determined the theology he enunciated. But he soon saw that appealing to the Bible did not silence his subordinationist opponents who also appealed to scripture, quoting texts that seemed to support their position. Like Athanasius and Augustine before him, he concluded that Philippians 2:4-11 prescribed how scripture was to be read correctly. He returns to this text time and time again. Here he sees the scriptures teaching that in becoming man the Son willingly and freely chose to subordinate himself for our salvation. He took “the form of a slave ... and became obedient to the point of death.” On this basis Calvin insists, like Athanasius and Augustine, that all texts that speak of the frailty, subordination, or obedience of the Son refer only to his incarnate existence. Eternally, the Son is equal in divinity, majesty, and authority with the Father and the Spirit.

For Calvin, the Son perfectly reveals the Father. He is “God with us.” Like Athanasius, he loves to quote Jesus’ words in John 14:9, “whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Boldly he argues the Son’s divine status is not bestowed by the Father. He is God in his own right (*autoth-eos*). Nevertheless, this revelation of God’s self is in the flesh and as such is “veiled” and “concealed,” recognized only by faith.³⁰ In response, Calvin’s opponents argued that the Son’s servant status and obedience, so clearly attested to in scripture, indicates rather an ongoing subordinate status for the Son. The great Reformer goes to great pains to refute his critics. He notes that Paul quite specifically in Philippians 2:8 speaks of the Son’s “obedience” as one of the human traits that his “voluntary” emptying of himself involved. He writes,

Laying aside the splendor of majesty, he showed himself obedient to his Father (cf. Phil. 2:8).

Having completed his subjection, he was at last crowned with glory and honour (Heb. 2:9) and exalted to the highest Lordship that before him every knee should bow ... (Phil. 2:10).³¹

Then in the next subsection in his *Institutes*, in speaking of the soteriological work of the Son, Calvin returns to the matter of the Son’s obedience. Calvin points out that the son had to be obedient if he were to be the second Adam. To make his point Calvin asks,

How has Christ abolished sin, banished the separation between us and God and acquired righteousness to render God favourable and kindly towards us? To this we in general reply that he has achieved this for us by the whole course of his obedience. This is proved by Paul’s testimony: “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience we are made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).³²

Calvin then adds, “his willing obedience is the important thing because a sacrifice not offered voluntarily would not have furthered righteousness.” The voluntary nature of the Son’s obedience is a recurring motif in Calvin’s writings.

What Calvin says on this matter is unambiguous. For him the Son’s obedience is limited to the incarnation. It is indicative of his true humanity assumed for our salvation.³³ The Son’s last act of obedience was the cross (Phil. 2:8). From then on he rules as Lord and head over all. In this whole discussion on the person and work of Christ in the *Institutes* we see Calvin contrasting what he calls, “the time of his humiliation”³⁴ of his earthly ministry with his subsequent majesty and authority in heaven.³⁵ Thus for Calvin, to read back into the exalted status what scripture explicitly limits to the Son’s humbled status is a grave error. This he saw was the root cause of subordinationism of his day.

B. B. Warfield in his lengthy and detailed essay on Calvin’s doctrine of the Trinity concludes that Calvin’s aim was “to eliminate the last remnants of subordinationism,”³⁶ being in “inexpugnable opposition to subordinationists of all types.”³⁷

The twentieth century

Sadly from the time of Calvin until late in the twentieth century, most Protestant theologians lost interest in the doctrine of the Trinity, as did most Roman Catholic theologians. The tendency was to treat the Trinity as a formal doctrine that needed to be outlined and then left to one side. Not surprisingly, many of the discussions of the Trinity in theological textbooks from this period are sadly inadequate and sometimes historically and theologically in error. Theologians who purport to be teaching historical orthodoxy all too often endorse modalism or subordinationism.

Two exceptions to this general rule among Reformed and evangelical theologians should be noted. First we mention B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), the great defender of biblical authority. In opposition to the subordinationism espoused by Charles Hodge, Warfield wrote to “vigorously reassert the principle of equalisation” in the Trinity.³⁸ Mainly by appeal to the Bible he refuted arguments used to suggest that the Son and the Spirit are *eternally* subordinated in their subsistence” (personal being) and/or in their “operations” (work or function). Warfield does speak of the subordination of the Son in “function” in the work of redemption.³⁹ This subordination he says was voluntarily, “due to a convention, an agreement between the persons of the Trinity,” and he insists it is not eternal. This means that although the terminology differs, Warfield in speaking of the functional subordination of the Son is referring basically to what I call the temporal and voluntary subordination of the Son in the incarnation.

In even more detail, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) in the Netherlands masterfully restated the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity in the second volume of his *Dogmatics*, later translated into English in abbreviated form as, *The Doctrine of God*.⁴⁰ In this work Bavinck not only gives an excellent account of the doctrine of the Trinity as it had been historically developed but also sets out to repudiate modalism and all forms of subordinationism, two errors he sees as a perennial threats to the life and well-being of the Church.

However, most attribute the awakened contemporary interest in the doctrine of the Trinity to Karl Barth among Protestants and Karl Rahner among Roman Catholics. More has been written on this doctrine in the last thirty years than any other doctrine. This has involved a return to the historic sources and the development of the best insights from the Eastern and Western models of the Trinity. In this process, many have found the contribution of Athanasius particularly instructive.

Some discussions have sought to break new ground, but the predominant trend has been to utilise the best insights from the past, depicting the Trinity as the three divine persons bound together in a unity of being and action, mutually indwelling one another. The evangelical theologian Millard Erickson his 1995 book, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* eloquently sums up how the doctrine is understood by most contemporary theologians:

The Trinity is a communion of three persons, three centers of consciousness, who exist and always have existed in union with one another and in dependence on one another ... Each is essential to the life of the others, and to the life of the Trinity. They are bound to one another in love, *agape* love, which therefore unites them in the closest and most intimate of relationships. This unselfish, *agape* love makes each more concerned for the other than for himself. There is therefore a mutual submission of each to each of the others and a mutual glorifying of one another. There is complete equality of the three.⁴¹

Practical outcomes

Because virtually all theologians agree that the doctrine of the Trinity should inform human relationships correctly, enunciating the historically developed doctrine of the Trinity is of great practical consequence. If in the Trinity all have the same authority, “none are before or after,” all are “co-equal” (the Athanasian Creed), then the doctrine of the Trinity calls into question all forms of human domination. It reminds us that totalitarian regimes that ride

roughshod over people or hierarchical ordering that presupposes that some are born to rule and others to obey cannot and never will reflect the divine ideal seen in the Trinity. And to be quite specific, rather than supporting the permanent subordination of women in the church and the home, the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity suggests exactly the opposite.

Postscript: The difficult texts

In answer to what I have written some will reply that I have not explained those few often quoted texts that do suggest the Son is subordinate to the Father. I have dealt with the obedience theme but what about John 14:28, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 15:28 and the fact that the Father sends the Son? Let me very briefly comment on these few texts subordinationists love to quote so as not to leave any loose ends.

John 14:28: “the Father is greater than I.” This is a difficult text to be sure because it stands in stark contrast to John’s teaching that the Son reveals the Father and the Father and the Son are one. The best solution would seem to be that given by Ambrose, Augustine, Calvin and many others: Jesus here speaks as the incarnate Son in his state of humiliation.

John 4:34 etc.: In John’s Gospel, Jesus is he who is “sent” by the Father. In that the Son is sent, some see eternal subordination implied. He always does as he is commanded. However in John, the sending of the Son is best explained in terms of the Jewish *shaliach* principle: the one sent has the same authority of the one who sends. If this is the case, sending does not indicate subordination but equal authority.

1 Corinthians 11:3: “God is the head of Christ.” Many evangelicals today think that here Paul speaks of a four-fold hierarchy, God-Christ-man-woman. This is not the case. Paul in fact speaks of a three-fold pairing; in each case one person being the metaphorical head of another, and not in a hierarchical order. First he mentions Christ and man and last, God and Christ. What Paul seems to be doing in this verse and throughout this passage is seeking to differentiate men and women, not subordinate Christ or women.

Theologian Wayne Grudem wants us to believe that the Greek word *kephale* (translated into English as “head”) always means a “person in authority over.”⁴² His premise is that words have one fixed meaning, the context does not matter. Virtually all linguists are of another opinion. Any given word has a range of meanings and the context is the most important indicator of that meaning. The erudite Anthony Thiselton carefully considers Grudem’s thesis and dismisses it. He holds that Paul is playing on the “multiple meanings” of *kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and in v. 3 it does not “denote a relation of subordination or authority over.”⁴³ The context rules out of court Grudem’s understanding of *kephale* in v. 3 because Paul immediately goes on to speak of men and women leading the congregation in prayer and prophecy, the two most important ministries in the Corinthian church, so long as they are differentiated by what they have or do not have on their “head.” To reply that prophecy does not signify authority to speak on behalf of God, whereas teaching does, is special pleading. Paul makes prophecy the second most important gift ahead of teaching (1 Cor. 11:28) Here we need also to remember that elsewhere in Paul the risen Son is said to be “head over all things” (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10)—and no one disputes that Paul in these verses is speaking of Christ as “a person in authority over.”

1 Corinthians 15:28: In this passage Paul seems to speak of the Son’s rule coming to an end at the consummation of all things and of him becoming subject to the Father. The first problem this text raises is that elsewhere the Son’s reign is said to be “forever” (2 Sam. 7:13; Isa. 9:7; Lk.1:33; 2 Peter 1:11; Rev. 7:10-12, 11:15; cf. Eph. 1:20). Then there is the question as to whether the Greek verb translated “subjected” is passive voice, “Christ is subjected by God”, or middle, “Christ subjects himself.” The latter seems preferable because in the incarnation the Son voluntarily subordinates himself, and this would be a parallel. What Paul thus seems to be suggesting is that the rule God the Father gave to God the Son at the resurrection is freely handed back to the Father by the Son at the end. Rather than speaking of fixed roles, or of the eternal subordination of the Son, this text indicates a changing of roles in differing epochs.

This article is available at www.cbeinternational.org

Footnotes

1. This essay draws on the first part of my book, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), but exhibits some development in my thinking as I continue to read the Bible and the historical sources. *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* is available at www.equalitydepot.com
2. I put the word “person” in quotes because there has been much debate as to what is the best word to designate the divine three. “Person” when used in a trinitarian sense is acceptable if it is not taken as an exact synonym of what the word person means when used of humans.
3. Ted Peters, *God as Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993), p. 45.
4. The eternal role subordination of the Son apart from subordination in being is given classic expression in W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 454- 70. I list numerous articles and books outlining this position in my, *The Trinity*, p. 23, n. 8. To this list should be added W. Grudem (ed.), *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002). See especially pp. 37, 47-52, 233-253. This position is entirely novel. It has no historical antecedents. Previously the argument has been eternal subordination in being/nature/essence and work/operation/function are two sides of one coin. The classic expression of the contemporary case for the eternal subordination of the Son in being *and* role is found in the 1999 *Sydney Anglican Doctrine Commission Report*, “The Doctrine of the Trinity and its Bearing on the Relationship of Men and Women,” quoted in full in my *The Trinity*, pp. 122-137. Other examples of this position are also given in my book. In the Sydney report at one point the subordination of women is explicitly grounded in the “differences in being” within the Godhead (par. 25).
5. All accept that the Son was for a limited period (*temporally*) subordinated in the incarnation. What is in dispute is whether or not the Son is subordinated in the *eternal* or immanent Trinity in his being/nature/person and/or work/operation/function. I will argue that orthodoxy has always held that it is a grave error to *eternally* subordinate the Son in his being *or* work for one implies the other.
6. In my *The Trinity*, pp. 60-62, I show that the Apologists— Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus—each in their own way adopt this approach.
7. R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) p. 103.
8. Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, p. 103.
9. The other two are modalism and tritheism.
10. In more detail see my *The Trinity*, pp. 60-85.
11. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson), vol. 1, pp. 445, 460-62, 464-65, 467-68, 474. It is to be noted that Hodge gives no support to eternal role subordination apart from a subordination in person. He holds that the Son is eternally subordinated in his person and operations or functions.
12. Exactly the same approach is needed today in the debate over what the Bible teaches on the status and ministry of women where there is a parallel tension in the texts. See my *The Trinity*, 194-211.
13. For what follows I refer readers to, “Four Discourses Against the Arians”, in *Athanasius, Selected Works and Letters*, vol 4, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (hence-forth *NPNF*), ed P. Schaff and H. Wace (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).
14. *Athanasius*, 3.29 (p. 409).
15. “Four Discourses”, 3.4 (p. 395), 3.5 (p. 395), 3.6 (p. 396), “The Councils”, 3.49 twice (p. 476).
16. I refer readers to the writings of the Cappadocians in *NPNF*, vols. 5, 7, and 8 rather than secondary sources.
17. This insight first found in Athanasius was later called in Greek, the doctrine of *perichoresis*. *Kevin Giles is a CBE’s conferencespeaker. He is the Vicar of St. Michael’s, North Carlton in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Australia. He has been in parish ministry for over thirty years, and holds a doctorate in New Testament studies; he served as a theological consultant for World Vision, Australia, in the mid-1990s. He has published widely; his books include The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate (InterVarsity, 2002); Making Good Churches Better (Melbourne: Acorn, 2001); What on Earth is the Church? (IVP, 1995); and Patterns of Ministry among the first Christians, (Collins-Dove, 1989).*
18. Basil “Letters”, *NPNF*, Vol 8, 189.7 (p. 32)
19. For details on this see Eunomius’ “Confession of Faith” as given by Hanson, *The Search*, pp. 619-621, particularly towards the bottom of p. 620.
20. *NPNF*, vol. 5, 6.4, (p. 187), For similar comments by Basil see *NPNF*, vol. 8, “Basil Letters”, 261.2 (p. 300).
21. As Gregory of Nazianzus says explicitly. See *NPNF*, vol. 7, “Theological Orations”, 4.5 (p. 311).
22. *NPNF*, vol. 5, “Against Eunomius”, 2.11 (p. 121). See also “Basil Letters”, 261.2 (p. 300).
23. *NPNF*, vol. 8, “On the Spirit”, 8.20 (p. 14)
24. See further my *The Trinity*, p. 100.

Unit 2 “God’s Perfect Plan for His Creation”

25. It is to be noted, however, that from the eleventh century there has been Eastern and Western versions of this creed that differ as to whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone or the Father and the Son. I explain this debate below.
26. See the translation of *De Trinitate* by E. Hill, *The Trinity*, (Brooklyn: New City, 1991).
27. Hill, *De Trinitate*, 2.15.
28. i.e. the Father is always the Father of the Son, the Son is always the Son of the Father etc..
29. *De Trinitate*, 5.1 ff.
30. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed J. Neil, trans. F. L. Battles (London: SCM, 1960), 2.13.2.
31. *Institutes*, 2.14.3.
32. *Institutes*, 2.16.5.
33. P. van Buren, *Christ in Our Place*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 38, says, “We cannot speak of the obedience of Christ in Calvin’s theology without speaking of the strong emphasis he puts on the idea that this obedience was performed in Christ’s human nature only.” See pp. 23-40 where he develops this theme. For a virtually identical conclusion see also R. A. Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 1999), pp. 61-68.
34. *Institutes*, 2.11.12
35. On this basis Reformed theologians developed their Christology speaking of the two states of Christ, his humiliated state in the incarnation and his exalted state after the resurrection.
36. Calvin’s “Doctrine of the Trinity” in *Calvin and Augustine*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), p. 230.
37. Calvin’s “Doctrine of the Trinity”, p. 251.
38. B.B. Warfield, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity”, in *Biblical Foundations* (London: Tyndale, 1958), p. 116.
39. “The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity”, p. 110.
40. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. and ed. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951).
41. Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), p. 331.
42. Grudem, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 47.
43. Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 816. D. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), pp. 506-516, reaches virtually the same conclusion.

Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 3

God's Perfect Plan for Us to Rule His Garden

Development Associates International

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA
Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 3: God's Perfect Plan for Us to Rule His Garden

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Readings:

Beyond Sex Roles, by Gilbert Bilezikian, Chapter 1, God's Creation Design

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Identify more of your own assumptions about what the Bible says about women and decide which ones are faithful to a good understanding of the Bible.
- State views of what men and women were designed to do, according to the Bible.
- Identify what God has called very good, His Kingdom here on earth, by reflecting on what it looked like and how it was designed to function.

Introduction

You are about to begin studying a segment of a course called **Women in Leadership and Ministry – Choosing the Better Part**. This unit is titled **God's Perfect Plan for Us to Rule His Garden**. It is all about the task given to mankind in Genesis 1 and 2 of subduing the earth, and ruling over creation.

Readings:

For this unit, before you begin with the Lecturette below, stop and read the reading at the end of this unit, the Chapter by Dr. Bilezikian that begins on page 73. This will supply much needed background for the study of the rest of this unit.

Lecturette:

In Unit 2 we looked carefully at Genesis 1 and 2 and discussed in depth the picture created here of God's perfect plan for how we relate to one another and to God based on the fact that we were made in Their image, the model of the Trinity. Now we will look carefully at the task he gave to both men and women by giving them a common call to rule over the earth and the authority they needed to take up that role of ruling over the earth.

What does Created in "our image" really mean?

Let's stop and go back to one of the key passages we just looked at Gen. 1:26-28.

Answer Box#1

Stop and read Gen 1:26-28 How does being created in "our image" and the task of ruling relate in this passage?

The reason we are created in his image is so that we can rule over the rest of creation. Something about being created in God's image enables us to rule in a way that will please God. So, many of the characteristics of the Trinity inform not only how we relate to one another and to Him but also how we should rule.

When God said we are "created in His image," it means that we have many God-like features, such as free-will and a spiritual nature that none of the other creatures had. Men and women are unique because **ONLY** man and woman were made in the image of God.

No other part of creation was made in the image of God.

Adam and Eve are truly unique in the creation story. Just how unique is something that sets the Biblical creation narrative apart from other religions, from other traditions of how life began. To illustrate, let's read another passage. Look in Box 2 and follow the instructions there.

Answer Box # 2

Read Genesis 2:20-24. What do we see here about the nature of woman? Is she made from the same substance as man, or did she spring from a different source?

These are important verses. It's deeply important to understand that woman was created from the same thing as man, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. This isn't about whether it was a rib, or a piece of his head, or a toe, etc. Men don't have one less rib than women, as one rabbinical writing tries to prove. This is about man and woman being from the same substance.

The original text seems to say from his side, not specifically about a rib. If there is symbolism here, it is about being side by side and equal partners, not about who has the most ribs. It's about flesh of my flesh. Eve was fashioned from Adam, not from dust as a separate animal, but rather from the same substance and nature as man. She is of equal material and substance, not like one of the animals or a plant. It's a reinforcement of Genesis 1:26-28, that man and woman are uniquely created, of the same substance, and in the image of God, unlike the other creatures.

Paganism versus Christian Thought on Creation

If we start to deny this quality of woman (that she is created from the same substance as man), we are actually reflecting paganism; this is why the biblical account is so graphic about what woman was created from. Let's look at this in detail by reading about Greek thought on the creation of woman.

Chapter 2, The Greek Perspective of Women, from "I Commend to You Our Sister", (an unpublished master's thesis by David Joel Hamilton. p.32).

"In order to understand the presuppositional foundation of Greek thought with regards to women, it is crucial for us to consider Hesiod's monumental poem, The Theogony. This unique work 'became the standard Greek version' detailing the origin of the gods and thereby of humanity. Its place within the Greco-Roman world is not unlike that of Genesis in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It was foundational to their understanding of life. For centuries thereafter, well into the New Testament era and beyond, it was studied by Greek and Roman men as the most comprehensive and systematic treatise of its kind.

Though its formative influence can be likened to that of Genesis, the content of The Theogony is radically different from the Biblical account of creation. Whereas Genesis portrays the creation of women as a welcome and blessed act of a loving creator as part of the crowning finale of a good creation, The Theogony depicts a tragically different point of view. The stories of Eve and Pandora could not be more at odds with one another.

According to Hesiod, a time existed on earth when men lived blissfully without the presence of women. This paradise was lost when sly Prometheus stole fire from the Olympian gods and shared it among his fellow men. In a vindictive rage, Zeus conceived the most horrifying and dire punishment possible for Prometheus and all his descendants, a punishment that would cause them eternal sorrow. Woman is created as Zeus' forever curse, the inescapable bane of man. Hesiod does not mince words. He declares that Zeus 'made an evil thing,' a woman named Pandora. She is called a 'beautiful evil' and a 'sheer guile, not to be withstood by men. For from her is the race of women and female kind; of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble.'

As if to make sure we did not miss the importance of this tale, Hesiod retells it with flourish in his Works and Days. He states that before the genesis of women 'men lived on earth remote and free from ills and hard toil and heavy sicknesses.' Zeus reportedly says, 'I will give men as the price for fire, an evil thing in which they may all be glad of heart while they embrace their own destruction.' Zeus is very cunning in his vengeance. He cloaks the evil in an irresistibly beautiful body so as to better deceive men and dupe them into accepting their own destruction. Woman is created to be a pleasant poison, a desirable doom, for she, made with 'a shameless mind and a deceitful nature,' is a 'hopeless snare.'"

Answer Box # 3

Describe in your own words the basic differences between the Genesis account of the creation of women and this Greek account of the creation of women.

Which version is most closely reflected in the way women are treated and portrayed in your culture?

As we look around us today, it is not hard to see that women are often perceived as the Greek authors saw them, a beautiful and difficult to resist source of evil.

Let's look more deeply at Greek and Roman thought and how they have influenced Western thought and, in fact, influenced thought throughout the world about women.

Here are a few thoughts from Greek writing and culture:

GREEK Perspective on women

It's important to realize that in most Greek and Roman literature, woman is less than man and springs from a different source. Greek and Roman literature are the sources of all of our western culture and thought

- *Greek Poetry—Women were the greatest of evils and the source of all other evil. i.e. according to Hesiod, “a time existed on earth when men lived blissfully without the presence of women. This paradise was lost when sly Prometheus stole fire from the Olympian gods and shared it among his fellow men. In a vindictive rage, Zeus conceived the most horrifying and dire punishment possible, for Prometheus and all his descendants, a punishment that would cause them eternal sorrows—woman—**Pandora**.*
- *Greek philosophy is much the same. Plato and Aristotle shaped not only their generation, but generations to come—their philosophy included a clear undercurrent of hostility towards women.*
- *Greek tragedy portrays the same attitude. Women are loathed and deprecated in the tragedies; they ultimately are considered totally worthless. Apart from her identity in relationship to a man in marriage, a woman is valueless. Women had no intrinsic worth in the Greek thinking. Their only value was that which was acquired by association with a man, either as wife or daughter.*
- *In Greek comedy, “women are abominations...sluts...household pests,” and the chorus adds, “O nothing, nothing in the world so hateful you will find as shameless women, save of course the rest of womankind.”*
- *Medically by Greek physicians, women were thought to be non-contributors to the generation of life. Hippolytus proposes that Zeus do away with women and let men beget children by offering a sacrifice in his temple so that men can dwell free, in free homes untroubled by womankind.*

ROMAN:

1. Shaped by Venus and Aphrodite, women were seen as basically evil. Doing evil to them was not unjust, but actually their just reward!

2. A classic example is **carrying the bride over the threshold**. Laws of marriage in Rome were based upon the tale of Romulus. According to tradition, Rome was bereft of women. To solve that problem, Romulus (founder of Rome) decided to host an athletic event and invite the neighboring Sabines. While their guests participated in the games, the Romans carried off the Sabine women by force and made them their wives. This so-called "Rape of the Sabines" was the original paradigm of Roman marriage. Another custom was to pass a spear over the head of the bride in the marriage ceremony to remind them of how the first Roman wives were obtained. In fact, the Roman custom of carrying the bride over the threshold of the house is symbolic of the fact that the first Romans "carried off by force the first Roman brides...."

Just keep in mind that Greek and Roman culture are the basis for Western culture. Often there is the idea that women only have value through their association with man, with a husband for instance. This was carried out to the extreme through the practice of widow burning in India. There a widow jumped or was thrown on the fire burning the body of her dead husband because she no longer had value if her husband was dead.

What about other pagan stories? Take Hinduism, for example; what is the source of woman there? Is it different than man?

The Mandate of Dominion

Let's go back once more to Genesis 1 again and re-read the verses below.

Answer Box # 4

Read Genesis 1:26-28 one more time. Who did God intend to rule over the earth and everything in it?

We've talked about God's relational nature. The other primary characteristic of God that is reflected in mankind is the quality of dominion. Men AND women were equally created for dominion over the entire earth, just as they were equally created for relationship with God and with each other. Later we will see that, after the fall, men took on more of the attributes of dominion and women of relationship, but it's good to see and understand that both dominion and relationship are characteristics of God and both man and woman were made for both.

Gen 1:28-30 shows there is a mutuality of ruling. Man and woman shared a common destiny, because they had a common creator and a common call. Authority was delegated equally to them. Let me say it again, they have a common creator and a common destiny.

Between dominion mandate and The Fall

Genesis 1:31 says, "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

This is the complete picture, that all of His creation is VERY GOOD. It is God's perfect will and His perfect plans. This was His intention for the earth and His creation, that His Kingdom would be perfectly reflected. What do you think it looked like?

Answer Box # 5

What did existence in the Garden of Eden look like in that week after creation, the time between Genesis 2 and Genesis 3? If you had to use your imagination to describe it, what would say? What did the garden itself look like? How did the animals relate to one another? What did God want Adam and Eve to do all day? What was their relationship like?

At first as you thought about this, I'm sure you struggled with it. What we know from scripture is so limited, very little in some ways, and yet we know that it was beautiful. There were beautiful trees, rivers, and plenty of food, for example.

We know that there were some rules and structure because God had laid down His rules about the trees that were not to be eaten from. There must have been peace and harmony and incredible innocence because we know that the man and woman had no idea that they needed clothes.

We know that they had an amazing relationship with God because he was accustomed to walking and talking with them freely in the Garden in the cool of the day. Although we struggle to understand how that must have felt, because we now have relationship with Him again through Jesus blood, we do have a glimmer of what that must have been like and we can be sure it was amazing!

But now, what did they do all day? Did you struggle with this? I hope you thought that they must have been creating things; songs, art, expressions of their praise for God—because since they have God's characteristics they must have had God's creative abilities. They may have been exploring, building, discovering, playing games, enjoying friends, basically many of the things we do today, but without the taint of sin on all their efforts.

Probably our greatest clues of what they were doing come from the New Testament when Jesus tells us about the coming of the Kingdom of God. When he taught us to pray he said, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," just as it was initially in the Garden.

We know that when John the Baptist asked if he was "the one they were waiting for" he answered by saying,

"Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor." Matthew 11:4-6.

So we know what kind of activities are associated with the restoration of God's Kingdom, helping us to identify what God's Kingdom looks like in its restored form.

We also know that when he was explaining who he was and what he came to do in the context of restoring God's Kingdom that he quoted from Isaiah telling the people:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19.

It is therefore simple to deduce that if those are the things Jesus came to do in restoring God's Kingdom here on earth to its first status at creation that there must have been no poor, no evil, no prisoners, no sick, no oppressed. So this is what things looked like then, beauty, equality, freedom, health, riches, pure air and water, and a close communion with the Father.

Continually he was telling people that the Kingdom of God was at hand, and then asking them to pray that God's Kingdom would come. And in fact that is where he left us, anticipating through his act of redemption what it would be like when he comes again and thus being able to imagine what life in the Garden of Eden was like. Leaving us to live in this

in between time when only his people, his Church, are able to bring his Kingdom presence in our world. When we are charged with the task to be and do Kingdom here on earth. He modeled what that looked like through his life and death.

But I apologize because we are getting way ahead of our story. Experiencing the Fall, understanding the need for Kingdom restoration through Jesus redemption, those are coming in the next chapters...

Working Relationships before the Fall

And what model do we have of working relationships in the garden? We know that they desperately need each other because God said it was not good to be alone. We know that they share the task of subduing the earth, the task they were both created for. We know that they are to help and serve each other following the model of the Trinity, the model which they were created in the image of. We have nothing else to work from without adding something which does not exist into the text here. We only know that we have two beings made of the same substance and designed and equally charged to rule and reign over all of creation working in perfect harmony with no power disputes. This is what working relationships in the Garden of Eden must have looked like!

Is God Male?

Let us take the time for one more thought about this time of perfection and creation and who God is since we are made in His image to rule and reign. Look at verse 27 of Chapter 1 of Genesis. Stop a moment and read the verses in Box 9 and answer the questions posed there.

Answer Box # 6

Read Genesis 1:27 "...in our image..." Now read Psalms 103:13 and Isaiah 54:4-5. Compare the images in those scriptures to Isaiah 49:14,15 and Deuteronomy 32:18. Is God male or female? Why do you believe these different and possibly confusing images are used to describe God and His feelings for us?

Is God male? This is a terribly important question when it comes to the issue of women in leadership. Why is it so important? Because if God is male and the pastor or leader stands in God's place to lead, then it follows that the leader or pastor should be male.

It's also terribly important on the issue of how women relate to God. As father, yes, as redeemer, yes—but as made in His image? This leaves us questioning. It's difficult and we start thinking of ourselves as somehow less than men because we don't seem to be made exactly in HIS image.

Why do we tend to think of God as male? It's due to the frequent use of the male pronoun, just as I did above, when we talk about God. He sent His son, who was God, as Jesus—a male—to earth.

Imagery in Scripture portrays other ideas as well about God's gender. Other examples include the familiar passage, "Oh Jerusalem if only I could gather you under my wings as a hen gathers her chicks..." or "as the deer pants for the water so my soul longs for you oh God." Are these images of God more male or more female?

More and more examples come to mind. Look at Isaiah 54:4-5. There we see God portrayed as a husband. The intent in this passage though is not to portray God's sexuality, but rather His jealous and enduring love like a husband. There are several images of God

as mother, or giving birth (Deuteronomy 32:18), just as there are several images of God as King, conqueror, and triumphant leader of an army (Psalm 18:10,14).

What is terribly important to understand from all of these references is that God is neither male nor female, but He has characteristics of both genders. This is hard for us to find language for, however, because God is not an impersonal "it." "He" is a person.

Jesus came to earth as a male not primarily to display the "maleness" of God, but because he came to accomplish certain purposes. He came into a specific cultural setting and had to conform to the expectations of that setting in order to be free to teach, preach, mentor disciples, give birth to the Church and accomplish all that God had for Him here. In the next unit we will look more at the role of Jesus on this earth as it relates to women and redemption.

Look at Box 7 below. Here is a quote from Katherine M. Haubert that brings some clarity on this issue.

Answer Box # 7

"Scripture speaks of God as man so that people would not understand him as a thing or as an impersonal creature but as one who is in personal relationship with his people. This way of speaking is merely a concession to our lack of understanding. God clearly stated, 'I am God, and not man' (Hos. 11:9). God is not man, God is simply God. He has no sexual characteristic; and that distinguishes him immediately from all the other gods of the ancient world. However, he does embody characteristics that Scripture sometimes identifies as masculine and at other times as feminine."

("Women as Leaders, Accepting the challenge of Scripture", Katherine M. Haubert, MARC, 1993, p.8)

Probably one of the most helpful understandings on this subject comes from Darrow Miller, of Food for the Hungry. He has quite rightly pointed out that God could not reflect all of who He is in one gender, therefore He made man AND woman. Look at Genesis 1:27 again. Some of His attributes He reflected in His creation of man and some He reflected in His creation of woman. Equal, yes, though wonderfully different; but the two together reflecting who God is. When we see God as male we have a distorted or one dimensional picture of His nature.

Relationship and Dominion

We have come to the end of Genesis 2 and therefore we must soon enter the tragedy that happens next in the story in Genesis 3, but before we do, let's just savor this moment because it is such an amazing point in the story. We have seen God (he/them) create the earth and all that is in it. We have seen the beauty and perfection, the harmony and the peace, the justice and wealth.

God has created two creatures in His image that are different than all the others. And while they are two different expressions male and female they share the same substance, the same authority and the same calling. God has seen it and said that it is very good.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

Look back at the questionnaire in Box 10 of Unit 1 (pp. 14-15) that you filled out concerning what you believe. Look specifically at questions 1 - 5. If you filled out the questionnaire again now, would any of your answers be different? If so, how and can you think of two specific ways this change will be reflected in a change in your behaviour as a Christian leader?

Readings

God's Creation Design* by Gilbert Bilezikian

Chapter 1 – God's Creation Design

Genesis One

In majestic strokes and with cosmic cadences, the first page of the Bible sets forth the story of God's dealings with mankind within the designs of creation. The beginnings of human history are correlated to the beginnings of time itself, and human life is described as the glorious culmination of God's creative endeavors.

The creation account moves swiftly from the development of infinite space to the establishment of the heavenly bodies surrounding the earth and of the earth itself. Then God causes the earth to produce the vegetable kingdom, while land and sea combine to bring forth animal life.

It is precisely at this point that a break occurs in the story. A dramatic change is noted in God's method of creation. Up to this point, God had spoken and His will had come into being. Each phase of creation was accomplished through verbal command, by remote control as it were. But God's approach to the creation of humans is different.

First, there is a pause of deliberation (v. 26) as God determines to make human beings in His image and to assign to them the task of exercising dominion over the earth. It is only after this statement of purpose that God is shown proceeding with the creation of man and woman as beings distinctively invested with His image. This unique feature pertaining to the creation of humans receives further amplification in chapter two of Genesis. But we can already draw some valuable lessons from the account in chapter one.

Genesis 1:26 (RSV)

"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion"

Lesson: God determines to make "man" (singular), but refers to "man" as "them" (plural). The same phenomenon occurs in verse 27. These seeming anomalies are not grammatical errors in the Hebrew text. They reflect the fact that the designation "man" is a generic term for "human beings" and that it encompasses both male and female. This fact is made especially clear in Genesis 5:2 where the word *man* designates both male and female: "He created them male and female; at the time they were created, he blessed them and called them 'man'" (NIV).ⁱ

Thus, when God declares, "Let us make man in our image . . ." the term *man* refers to both male and female. Both man and woman are God's image-bearers. There is no basis in Genesis 1 for confining the image of God to males alone.ⁱⁱ

Lesson: Since God is one, the plural self-designation for God ("let us"; "in our likeness") may seem strange. Various explanations have been offered for this usage. But in the light of Genesis 1:1-3, where God is described as Father-Designer of the cosmos (v.1), as nurturing, protecting Spirit (v. 2), and as creative Word (v 3), the plural pronouns used for God seem to refer to the multipersonality existing within the Triune God. In other words, God in His whole being, with the active participation of the three persons of the Trinity, is involved in the creation of humans. Inevitably, something of the plurality that characterizes the nature of God will be reflected in His image-bearing creatures. That man comes as male and female is the reflection of an essential aspect of the Trinity within the being of God.ⁱⁱⁱ

Genesis 1:27 (RSV)

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

Lesson: From intention (v 26) God moves to action, as the moment for the creation of humans arrives. The design calls for "man" (singular) made in His image (note the double parallelistic emphasis on the "image"). Then the divine decree crystallizes into action and (surprise!) the result is not one person but two. The original order called only for the creation of "man"; but because the product had to conform to the specifications of the divine image, "man" inevitably came as male and female.

In other words, the male/female sexual differentiation reflects realities contained within the very being of God and derived from Him as His image. Femaleness pertains to the image of God as fully as maleness. God is neither male nor female. He transcends both genders since they are both comprehended within His being.^{iv}

Genesis 1:26, 28

"Let them have dominion:

Lesson: There is a very close connection between humans possessing the image of God and the divine mandate for them to have dominion over the earth. By virtue of the fact that they bear God's image, humans are delegated to exercise some of His authority over creation. They are authorized to act as God's commissioned agents.

The repetition of the mandate to rule the earth in verse 28 highlights the importance of this concept for the definition of roles that man and woman play vis-à-vis the created order. Since both man and woman bear the image of God, they are both assigned the task of ruling the earth, without any reference to differentiation on the basis of sex. The text gives no hint of a division of responsibilities or of a distinction of rank in their administration of the natural realm. They are both equally entitled by God to act as His vice-regents for the rulership of the earth. The lack of any restrictions or of any qualifications in their participation in the task implies roles of equality for man and woman.

Lesson: The statement also calls attention to the authority structure delineated in the first chapter of Genesis. Because of His Creator rights, God allocates spheres of authority. He assigns limits to the firmament, to the water, to the earth. He sets boundaries to the process of reproduction in order to preserve the integrity of each genus. He ordains specific environments for the proliferation of each species. He gives the celestial bodies "for signs and for seasons and for days and years." He establishes the sun and the moon "to rule over the day and over the night." He carefully structures the ecological chain between humans and plants, and between animals and plants (vv. 29-30).

He prescribes in detail human rulership over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over every living thing that moves over the earth including cattle and creeping things, and over all the earth (vv. 26,28).

The whole created universe—from the stars in space to the fish in the sea—is carefully organized in a hierarchy of order that is meticulously defined in Genesis 1. And yet, there is not the slightest indication that such a hierarchy existed between Adam and Eve. It is inconceivable that the very statement that delineates the organizational structure of creation would omit a reference to lines of authority between man and woman, had such a thing existed. Man and woman were not negligible or incidental happenings in the story of creation. They constitute the climactic creative achievement of God. Consequently, the definition of authority structures between man and woman would be at least as important as the definition of their authority over birds, fish, and cattle. This is all the more so since the biblical text describes hierarchical organization as an element intrinsic to creation. But nowhere is it stated that man was intended to rule over woman within God's creation design. The fact that no reference is made to authority roles between man and woman in a text otherwise permeated with the concept of hierarchical organization indicates that their relationship was one of mutuality in equality and that considerations of supremacy of one over the other were alien to it and may not be imposed upon it.^v

Genesis 1:28 (RSV)

"Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . "

Lesson: God's procreation mandate (the command to reproduce and to populate the earth) offers an added explanation for the sexual differentiation between man and woman. Its purpose was not for one sex to dominate the other. To the contrary, through their harmonious union, man and woman were to fulfill God's command to establish human rule over creation. Because both man and woman are involved in procreation, both contribute cooperatively to the earth's being subdued. The sexual differentiation was partly intended by God to provide humans with the means to exercise dominion over the earth they were to populate. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the purpose for the sexual differentiation was structural or that it was intended for half of the population to govern the other half. Instead, the sex difference is shown as being instrumental for man and woman to effect together their God-ordained mastery over the earth. In this shared partnership they are equal. Their equality is further emphasized in the second chapter of Genesis, where the additional and even more basic reason for the sexual differentiation is given as mutual fulfillment (Gen. 2:23-24).

To summarize in plain language: In the Genesis 1 account of God's creation design, neither maleness or femaleness connotes a disparity in rank or function. Both man and woman bear the image of God, so that their sexuality is the reflection of different aspects of the Creator's personality. As a result, they both share equally the God-assigned task of creation rulership without any intimation of role distinctions.

Genesis Two

Although it is sometimes called the second creation story, this chapter is not repetitious of the first. It reinforces the teachings of chapter one and provides some new insights. A quick glance at its contents reveals that this text focuses essentially on the final phase of God's creative acts, the forming of man and woman. It is the sixth day of creation being replayed in slow motion and as a close-up, revealing details that serve to amplify and to reaffirm the lessons of the first chapter. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a careful examination of the key statements of this chapter.

Genesis 2:18 (NIV)

"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Lesson: By any standards, Adam had it made in Eden. He lived in the midst of a garden landscaped to his taste (v.8); he had immediate access to all the food he needed (v.9); he had private swimming pools and streams for fishing and canoeing (vv. 10-14); he owned mountains of fine gold and precious stones (v. 12); he had an occupation to keep him active and in good physical shape (v. 15); and he was given the animal kingdom for leisure and pleasure (v. 19). However, in spite of such opulence, Adam was not fulfilled.

Adam's plight was that while he remained alone, he was only half of the story. The image of God in him, itself the imprint of the triune nature of God, yearned for the presence of his female counterpart without whom there was no fulfillment. This does not mean that fulfillment can only be found in marriage. Quite to the contrary, the Bible teaches that believers who can manage singleness find greater fulfillment in lives of celibate service than if they were married.^{vi}

The plight of Adam attests to the fact that God has created humans as social beings and that each person needs other persons for self-definition. Human beings are just as complementary to each other today as Adam and Eve were to each other in Eden. In his magnificent solitude, Adam was incomplete—because maleness does not automatically impart completeness. The full expression of humanity necessitated the creation of woman, not as a sublime afterthought or as an optional adjunct to independent and self-sufficient male existence, but as the indispensable counterpart to man in God's perfect creation. In God's very words, without woman creation was "no good."^{vii}

Lesson: God's resolve to make Adam a "helper suitable for him" reveals an additional imperative for the creation of woman. Adam had been given assignments that

required the assistance of a helpmate. According to Genesis 1, he was supposed to "multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." Evidently, these tasks called for a partner ("helper") complementary to him ("suitable for him"). The performance of God's creation mandate required the cooperative participation of both man and woman.^{viii} From this perspective, man is not more important than woman. Without woman, man would have been helpless and unable to fulfill his God-given mission.

Lesson: There was a time when uninformed teachers of the Bible seized upon the word *helper* to draw inferences of authority/subjection distinctions between men and women. According to them, *helper* meant that man was boss and woman his domestic. Fortunately, the study of the use of the word *helper* in the Old Testament has dispelled such misconceptions. It is now a matter of general knowledge that this Hebrew word for "helper" is not used in the Bible with reference to a subordinate person such as a servant or an underling. It is generally attributed to God when He is engaged in activities of relief or rescue among His people.^{ix} Consequently, the word *helper* may not be used to draw inferences about subordinate female roles. If anything, the word points to the inadequacy and the helplessness of man when he was bereft of the woman in Eden. God provided him with a "rescuer."

Genesis 2:21-22 (RSV)

"So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

Lesson: The method used by God for the origination of woman is certainly the most bizarre element of this chapter. Until this point, every living organism had been drawn by God from the *ground*. "Out of the *ground* the Lord made to grow every tree" (v. 9); "out of the *ground* the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air" (v. 19); "God formed man of dust from the *ground*" (v. 7). The trees, the animals, and man himself derived their origin from the ground. Once God decided to create woman, it would appear that He would follow the same procedure and make Eve in the same manner He had formed Adam—out of the dust of the ground. A consistent method had been established. Since God wanted to form another human being, all He needed to do was to repeat the same procedure.

Instead, God had recourse to a strange cloning operation that demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt the essential identity between man and woman. Had Eve been made out of the ground, there might have existed some ambiguity about the integrity of her human nature. After all, animals had also been taken from the ground. She might have been human but to a lesser degree than man. However, since she was taken from Adam, there was no confusion possible about her full participation in his humanity. She was made from the same material as his own body. From one being, God made two persons.

There is no justification for the derivation of Eve from the body of Adam to be viewed as a sign of her subordination to him. Such a theory might have had a chance of being true if she had been made out of the ground like the plants, the animals, and Adam himself. But the story of Eve's creation teaches precisely the opposite lesson. Unlike Adam, she was made out of human flesh already in existence. Humanity twice refined, she is at least his equal.

Lesson: Some Bible expositors interpret the chronological primacy of Adam (the fact that he was formed before Eve) as a warrant for male supremacy over woman. Since such a theory is neither stated nor implied in the Genesis text, they attempt to prove their point by resorting to the dubious methods that we described earlier as biblical collage systems. They try to force upon the creation text an irrelevant birthright regulation that they pull out of the Mosaic legislation.^x Or, turning to the New Testament, they draw ill-fitting parallels between the preeminence of Christ as "first-born" to Adam as first-formed human.^{xi} In either case, not only is the method of such approaches questionable but the results are so farfetched that the arguments become self-defeating. There is no evidence in the creation text for the temporal

primacy of Adam to be interpreted as supremacy or rulership. Such a concept is present neither in the Old Testament nor in the New.^{xii}

As a matter of fact, a close scrutiny of Genesis invalidates such a theory. As soon as primal origination becomes a norm that confers dominance to the first in line, both Adam and Eve fall under the rulership of animals. According to Genesis 1, animals were created before humans. Therefore, they should rule over humans. The absurdity of such a theory is evident.^{xiii} Temporal primacy of itself does not confer superior rank.

The argument for male superiority drawn from Adam's primacy easily boomerangs against itself. The logic of the sequence of the days of creation moves from the void of nothingness to increasingly sophisticated modes of existence: brute matter, the vegetable realm, the animal kingdom, human beings. If Adam were considered the prototype of humanity, Eve would qualify as its supreme expression. Her formation would have brought God's works of creation to completion, moving from His image made from clay to its perfected duplication made from man.

However, neither was the creation of Adam God's practice shot at making humans, a sort of unveiling of the clay model that anticipates the formation of woman. Nor is woman the second sex. Both men and women (not just "all men") are created equal. And if "we hold these truths to be self-evident," it is because they were first taught in the Good Book.

Nowhere in the creation story (or in the remainder of the Bible) is man commanded to rule over woman, or woman denied equality with man because of man's original primacy. We can state categorically that the creation text attaches no hierarchical significance to the fact that man was created before woman. Its purpose is to show that both man and woman were uniquely made of the same human substance and that, as a result, they enjoyed, prior to the fall, a relation of full mutuality in equality.^{xiv}

Genesis 2:22 (RSV)

"And the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man
he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

Lesson: God who knows everything knew that the animal parade was a charade. The text makes this plain when it states that God brought the animals to the man "to see what he would call them" (v. 19). In naming the animals, that is, in the process of determining their definition and their function in relation to himself, Adam discovered his own uniqueness as a human being. Like Robinson Crusoe on his island, he was the only one of his kind. He recognized that the animals belonged in a different category of living beings, since "there was not found a helper fit for him" (v.20).

The naming of the animals served to set the stage for the magic moment of the first encounter between Adam and Eve. In this case, God simply "brought her to the man," without any expectation of his naming her. God knew that Adam would immediately recognize her humanity. The exercise of naming the animals was necessary, but it would be superfluous for the woman. Because the woman was drawn from his being, Adam would identify her instantly as the only other human present in the garden.

God's introduction to Adam of the animals as potential "helper" had a didactic purpose. It was intended as a teaching device. God's presentation of the woman to Adam was conclusive. It had the finality of a wedding rite, as suggested in verse 24. This difference in God's method of introducing the animals and then the woman to Adam emphasizes again the unique identity between man and woman within their essential humanity.

Genesis 2:23

"At last, this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man."

Although there is no indication given to the effect that God expected a particular kind of response from Adam as He did when he brought the animals to man, yet Adam proffered a spontaneous expression of recognition the moment he saw the woman. He identified her as his alter ego, much like his female twin. With evident relief he exclaimed, "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The identity indicated by this phrase is so complete that

common usage has adopted it to describe bonds of consanguinity that exist between parent and child rather than marital ties.

But Adam's expression of wonderment reached beyond the recognition of mere physical identity. He also added a sentence indicating the woman's participation in the fullness of his own humanity. She was wo/man as he was man. She was identical to him with a wee plus, a complementary difference that would combine with his own humanity to make hers complete as well.

In the preceding verse, God was described fashioning Adam's rib into a new creature already designated "woman" (v.22). Adam did not have to sit down, lay his chin in his hand à la Rodin, and wonder what kind of creature was being presented to him and what he might call her. He knew instantly that the new being was human, and he readily made his own the designation that God had already placed on her in the creative act described in verse 22.^{xv} With a joyful exclamation, Adam acknowledged his recognition of the deeper meaning of the divine initiative. For him, the creation of woman had marked the completion of humankind.

Adam's exclamation shows that he was in tune with God. He understood that God was presenting him with a being like himself, the companion perfectly suitable for him, his equal.^{xvi} The course of God's creative endeavors had found its appropriate culmination with the making of the woman. She was God's ultimate achievement, taken out of man and made in God's image, the fusing of human beauty distilled to its graceful essence with mirrored divine perfection, the sudden presence that caused the man to marvel in a whisper, "At last!"

Genesis 2:24 (RSV)

"Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife,
and they become one flesh."

The conjunction *therefore* links together Adam's statement (v. 23) and the application the author of Genesis derives from it. From the statement that affirms the essential identity between male and female, the author draws universal norms. The foundational nature of this text holds far-reaching significance for male/female relations. The fact that both Jesus and Paul appealed to it in their own teachings testifies to its importance.^{xvii}

Lesson: The marital bond is designed by God to take precedence over concern for the cohesion of a man's original family. He is allowed to break away from the parental circle to establish a new independent relationship. According to this text, the parents' role remains passive. The man takes the initiative to remove himself from his parents; he goes to his bride and joins her in the marital bond. The man's freedom of action in moving away and making his own choices does not reflect a family organization dependent on a father-ruler. Under a strictly patriarchal system, the father-ruler would be the one making those decisions; the new family would be aggregated to the patriarch's family, and it would remain under his authority. The independence enjoyed by the man in getting married and forming a separate "one flesh" entity argues against a patriarchic structure of the family as God's intent for the pre-fall economy of creation.

Lesson: Singularly, nothing is said of the bride's relationship with her own parents. She seems to be a free agent, in command of her own life. In this verse, the woman represents the stable point of reference. It is the man who moves toward her after leaving his parents. He attaches himself to the woman. She is not appended to his life. He is the one who adds his life to hers as he "cleaves" to her. The procedure of a man's separating from his father and cleaving to his wife reflects anything but a patriarch-dominated society.^{xviii}

The contrast between this creation model and the conditions that resulted from the fall is striking. After the fall, once the patriarchic pattern of societal organization became institutionalized, it was the bride who moved away from her home and who joined her husband within his father's household and under his jurisdiction. Abraham's command to his servant illustrates the point. "Go . . . and take a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:4, RSV). The same order might have been given for the acquisition of a piece of property, a horse, a chariot, or a pair of sandals. Such a condition is worlds apart from the creation ideal reflected in Genesis 2:24.

Lesson: It should be noted that the "one flesh" designation is applied uniquely to a couple. Parent and offspring are not a "one flesh" entity. As a matter of fact, the parental bond is destined to be broken, since "a man will leave his father and mother" (NIV). But, by definition, the union of the "one flesh" couple is indissoluble. Paradoxically, the blood relationship of parent and child is only temporary, but the union of two strangers becomes permanent and it is designated as "one flesh."

The question arises as to why the biological bonds between parent and child cannot be described as constituting "one flesh." The answer to this question is to be found in the levels of interdependency within relationship. The concepts of reciprocal dependency and mutuality in equality are intrinsic to the doctrine of oneness. Role differences exist between parent and child that do not exist between spouses. A child is unilaterally dependent on his parents. Normally, his parents are not dependent on him. Because of this disparity, he cannot be treated as an equal by his parents. Therefore, he is not "one flesh" with them and, once he becomes independent, may leave them. However, because husband and wife are mutually dependent in a relationship of equality, they "become one flesh" and their bond is characterized by permanency.

Again, the teachings of this text show that the notions of hierarchical distinctions or differences in rank between man and woman were completely absent in God's creation design.

Genesis 2:25

"And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed."

Lesson: Nakedness in the garden is mentioned as a concluding affirmation of the goodness of God's creation. It signified the unhindered freedom of humans in relation to each other and before God. Community meant a total sharing of intimacy that rendered the violation and exploitation of another's personhood impossible. The indispensable context for such reciprocal participation in the goodness of the body was a relationship of complete mutuality of which sexual union was only one of the components.

Lesson: The story of the fall in Genesis 3 reveals that the need for privacy is the result of sin. It is sin that separates humans from God—hence the need to hide among the trees (v. 8)—and from each other—the need for fig leaves (v. 7). Because of His mercy, God protects the rights of sinners to be spared being discovered in the shame of their alienation by the gaze of another sinner—He makes them garments of skin and clothes them (v. 21). The stare of the voyeur gives to one rebel power over another to which he has no claim. Even in sin, humans have an equal right to hide the misery of their separateness.

Whenever the principle of equal rights is denied and one sex is subjected to another, a natural outcome is the denial of the right of privacy for the subordinated party. Violation and exploitation ensue. The obscenities of rape, prostitution, and pornography are the sinful results of male dominance. To strip a woman naked and hold her down under the power of a knife, a fistful of money, or the glare of a camera is the supreme expression of man's rule over woman. Such rulership was not a part of God's creation ideal.

To summarize in plain language: The teachings of the second chapter of Genesis confirm and expand upon those of chapter one. They provide a rationale for the essential unity of human nature in male and female. They also show that in God's creation ideal, man and woman were expected to enjoy a relationship of mutuality in equality. There is nothing in Genesis 1 and 2 that provides even a hint of a disparity of nature or rank between man and woman.

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Notes:

1 In Hebrew, the word for man (adam) used with the article is a common noun. Without the article it becomes a proper name (similar to "the guy," and "Guy" as a first name). The latter occurs in Genesis 3:17; 4:25; and 5:1a ("... account of Adam's line"). In 5:1b ("When God created man") and in 5:2, the word adam is used with the article as a common noun.

2 Hurley correctly states, "Genesis says that both men and women are the image of God" (p. 172).

3 The poetic structure of Genesis 1:27 suggests an explanation for the nature of the image of God or imago Dei. The parallelism of lines one and two is resolved in the formal synthesis of line three. The third line provides a definition of the imago as male and female. Although sexuality does not exhaust the meaning of the imago, it expresses an essential trait of the divine nature. In other words, the difference between male and female in human life is similar to the distinctions between the persons of the Trinity within the being of God. The imago concept justifies this analogy while allowing for unity, equality, and complementarity within the plurality of persons in the divine mode of existence as well as in human life. The fact that the Trinity is imaged by a duality in human life instead of a human "trinity" indicates that the intent of the imago is not to create miniature duplicates of divinity. There can be only one God.

4 The use of sexual symbology in Scripture and of male imagery for divinity continues to be discussed in biblical scholarship, especially in the context of research pertaining to inclusive language translations. For alternative views, see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Beacon Press, 1973), Donald Bloesch, *Is The Bible Sexist?* (Good News, 1982), and Paul Jewett, *The Ordination of Women* (Eerdmans, 1980).

5 Hurley discusses the authority structure of Genesis 1 in a short paragraph (pp. 205-206) that contains several errors:

(a) He states that God "established a variety of realms with creatures to rule over them (day: sun; night: moon; sea: fish; air: birds; etc.)."

Critique: God did not command the fish to rule the sea, nor the birds to rule the air. He simply ordered them to proliferate and populate the elements (v. 22).

(b) According to Hurley, mankind has "dominion over all of the realms and the rulers."

Critique: God did not give mankind dominion over the sun, the moon, the day and the night (vv. 26, 28).

(c) In order to account for the absence of any mention of authority structure between man and woman in Genesis 1, Hurley states that "the chapter does not bring relationships within species into view. It does not comment on headship among animals, although there are clear dominant and subordinate roles among them."

Critique: Besides the inappropriate parallel drawn from "headship among animals" to humans, Hurley assumes gratuitously that "dominant and sub-ordinate roles" existed among animals prior to the fall. Nothing in the text warrants such an assumption. The concept of idyllic conditions devoid of dominance/subservience patterns is not foreign to the Old Testament (Isa. 11:6-7).

Genesis 1 is a taxonomic statement that conspicuously exempts the male/female relationship of internal hierarchical constraints. Maleness and femaleness are presented as divine gifts reflecting diversity within the imago Dei. The text does not permit their exploitation to support hierarchical dichotomies that might justify predetermined role distinctions.

6 See Matthew 19:10-12; 1 Corinthians 7:25-35.

7 Hurley's sentimental statement that God created the woman "to end the loneliness of man" (p. 32 and again p. 209) misses the point altogether. Beyond concern for the emotional welfare of Adam, the creation of the woman stemmed from ontological necessities rooted in the very nature of God. Femaleness was also an aspect of the imago Dei.

8 Hurley states correctly that Eve was formed from Adam "to join him in ruling the earth to the glory of God" (p. 32).

9 The Hebrew word for "helper" in Genesis 2:18 and 20 (ezer) appears about twenty times in the Old Testament in references such as Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 33:20; etc. The

Hebrew language has four other words for "helper" that denote subordination. None of those words is used in reference to woman in Genesis 2.

Hurley acknowledges the strength of the biblical evidence and concludes, "Woman's role as 'appropriate helper,' therefore, does not carry with it an implication of subordination" (p. 209).

10 Hurley attempts to develop into a major argument the practice of primogeniture (a legal provision that entitled the eldest son in a family to inherit twice the amount of the estate received by his brothers). He states, "Paul's appeal [in 1 Timothy 2:8 15] to the prior formation of Adam is an assertion that Adam's status as the oldest carried with it the leadership appropriate to a first born son" (p. 207). The fallacies contained in this ap-proach must be pointed out.

Critique: The only legislation contained in the Bible relative to primogeniture was enacted a considerable time after creation, since it is found in the Mosaic Law (Deut. 21:15 17). The only instance of the practice of the birthright contained in the Bible also occurs much later, in the story of Esau and Jacob (Gen. 27:19). Generations upon generations of families with multiple children are mentioned in the early chapters of Genesis with no hint of the existence of primogeniture regulations (Cain, Abel, and Seth in 4:1 2, 25; the sons and daughters of Lamech in 4:20 22; the sons and daughters of Seth's descendants in 5:7, 10, 12, 16, 19, 22, 30; Noah's three sons in 5:32; the sons of Noah's descendants in 10). It is therefore unjustifiable to project retroactively into the creation story a practice that receives no sanction in the creation account.

Critique: Ironically, in addition to the case of Esau and Jacob, the one other mention in the Bible of an instance of first born rights refers to their loss by Reuben (1 Chron. 5:1 2). This reduces the concept of primogeniture in the Bible to two or three incidental references—hardly sufficient grounds to exploit the concept of primogeniture as a device controlling the meaning of Genesis 1 and 2.

Critique: By Hurley's own admission, the principle of primogeniture applies to male siblings ("The inheritance laws of Israel . . . pass property through the male line" [p. 37]. "The first son inherited . . . twice what his brothers received" [p. 207]). Consequently, Hurley's attempt to apply the primogeniture model to the relationship of Adam and Eve (who were male and female and also husband and wife—not brothers!) puts a strain on the definition of primogeniture and makes it irrelevant to the relationship of Adam and Eve.

Critique: The biblical legislation on primogeniture concerned exclusively property rights. Despite Hurley's claim in the passage cited above, primogeniture did not accord rights of "leadership." Although older, Ishmael did not rule over Isaac (Gen. 21:12 13); Manasseh did not rule over Ephraim (Gen. 48 i 9); Judah, fourth in line among Jacob's twelve sons, was given the promise that his brothers would bow down before him (Gen. 49:8); although the youngest among eight brothers, David was made king over all of them (1 Sam. 16:11); Solomon ruled over his older brother Adonijah (1 Kings 1:53); and Shimri, although not the eldest, was chief over his brothers (1 Chron. 26:10 11). These few instances taken at random testify to the fact that the practice of primogeniture was observed loosely, and that rights of leadership were not intrinsic to the legislation. Hurley's claim that "Adam's status as the oldest carried with it the leadership appropriate to a first born son" is an invention not supported by biblical data. The creation text of Genesis 1 and 2 does not present man as the leader of woman, either explicitly or by implication.

Critique: The appeal to primogeniture as an argument for male rights of leadership over women contains its own contradictions. When enforced, primogeniture concerned primacy rights among male siblings. Should primogeniture considerations be now extended to apply to the status of women, consistency would require that primogeniture regulations be also and primarily enforced among male relations, since this was their original intent. If primogeniture should affect the status of women in church and family, it affects a fortiori the status of men in church and family. The honest application of primogeniture would require that no males except first born sons hold positions of leadership over their brethren in the church. In the family, the same rigor that demands the subservience of wives to husbands should obtain the subservience of all males to the oldest surviving male relative, be he father or brother. Inheritance practices should also be made to

conform to the requirements of primogeniture with the oldest son receiving most of the estate. Such practices should be legislated in churches with even more enthusiasm than the subservience of women since they allegedly constitute the original points of application of primogeniture. As a result, the very men who prohibit women from acceding to positions of leadership on the basis of primogeniture considerations would, by the force of their own argument, rule themselves out of church leadership positions and forfeit the right to speak on the issue unless they happen to be firstborn sons. Since this is unlikely to happen, one may rightfully be suspicious of a mentality that is willing to exonerate men of compliance to restrictive structures that pertain to them while imposing the same on women.

11 Hurley conflates disparate teachings from Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:22-23; and Colossians 1:15 18, noting "the cryptic imagery of this complex passage," and yet he goes on to draw the following conclusion: "Christ's authority, the model for husbands, is tied with his being the 'first born: We should not be surprised that Paul saw Adam's being 'first formed' as implying authority!" (p. 208). Surprised we are indeed, and we make the following points:

Critique: Contrary to Hurley's assertion, Christ's authority is never cited as a model for husbands in the New Testament, nor are husbands ever charged to wield authority over their wives. (cf. pp. 153 171).

Critique: Hurley's use of "first born" betrays a misunderstanding of the title's christological application. The title refers to the eternal generation of the Son and to His primordial preexistence: It is a title denoting dignity, not a description of origin. To draw a parallel between Christ as "first born" and Adam as "first formed" smacks of subordinationism, a heresy condemned by the church long ago. Neither the title nor its implications apply to Adam. In the Bible it is never bestowed on Adam, although, of all humans, he alone might have qualified for the designation of "first born" in its generative sense.

Critique: Paul's use of the title "first born" does not emphasize the principle of authority. It describes Christ as originator and inheritor of the church (Rom. 8:29 30) and of (not "over" as Hurley has it despite the genitive case) all creation (Col. 1:15 20). The christological title "first born" has no relation to the fact that Adam was formed before Eve. To try to force a correspondence between those two independent facts entails the risk of christological confusion.

12 See the discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:2 16 and 1 Timothy 2:11 15, p. 134 44 and p. 173 84.

13 Animals are described as enjoying a high status before the fall. They were not to be consumed as food by humans (Gen. 1:29). They were "formed" in the same manner and of the same material as Adam was (Gen. 2:1, 19a). Both Adam and animals received the identical designation of "living being" (Gen. 2:7, 19b). There existed sufficient correspondence between animals and Adam to suggest their suitability as plausible company for him. The affinity between pre fall animals and Adam was such that God deemed it a worthwhile experiment to parade the cattle, the birds of the air, and every beast of the field before Adam for the purpose of selecting a "helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:19 20). The dignity of animals was such that one of them, the serpent, being the most "subtle" or "crafty," was presumably able to stand upright before the curse, to communicate verbally as a matter of course with humans, and to lead them astray by imposing its will upon them (Gen. 3:1 6). If chronological primacy of itself confers rank, the animals were actually Adam's superiors since they were created before him. Some commentators believe that the possibility of an animal takeover was so real that God had to preempt such an eventuality by entrusting rulership over them to humans (Gen. 1:26, 28). Others argue that what they consider to be the rightful superiority of animals over man by order of temporal primacy was negated by the fact that the man, not animals, was made in God's image, and that the image took precedence over the principle of original primacy. The answer to this sophism is obvious. The woman was also made in the image of God. If the image takes precedence over the principle of original primacy, man may not claim superiority rights over woman. This line of argumentation throws Hurley into a dilemma, He maintains as dogma the notion of rulership based on priority of formation. At the same time, he also admits that the argument which "makes mankind subordinate to the animals which were made

before him needs to be explored" (p. 209). But he does not explore it. He hurriedly dismisses the argument in one paragraph consisting of a hodgepodge of Pauline teachings taken out of context and injected into the creation story (pp. 208-209). The lesson to be drawn from God's subordination of animals to humans is evident: priority of origination does not confer hierarchical superiority, either to animals over humans, or to man over woman.

14 The expression "mutuality in equality" may need to be defined. Of itself, mutuality does not imply parity. A relationship of mutuality may indeed exist between master and slave, father and son, colonel and corporal. But this does not make them equal in function or rank. Equality exists among persons who make decisions conjointly and who apportion tasks among themselves on the basis of gifts and qualifications rather than rank or sex.

15 For the meaning of "woman" see note 16, the sixth Critique, point (c).

16 With several other exponents of male dominance, Hurley attempts to find a basis for it in verse 23, which he interprets as Adam's naming of the woman. Astoundingly, he discusses this matter under the title, "Naming the Animals" pp. 210-212. He states that Adam's reaction to the newly formed woman in verse 23 "stresses his role over her in that he assigns her a name" (p. 212).

Critique: Hurley draws a parallel between the naming of the animals by Adam, assuming it to be "his exercise of authority" over them, and the naming of the woman "that reflected his role [of headship] with respect to her" (p. 220). The text of Genesis 2 does not justify drawing such a comparison. In verse 19, it is clearly stated that the purpose of the animals' being brought to man was for him to give each one its own name. No such mandate is given Adam in regard to the woman. In verses 22-23, there is no indication that a naming process was a necessary part of the woman's presentation to Adam.

Critique: Hurley posits that Adam's "rule is expressed in his naming of the animals" (p. 210). This view contradicts the stated purpose for the naming of the animals in verses 19-20. The presentation of the animals to Adam was intended to find "a helper suitable for him." This phrase constitutes a frame for the whole episode of the naming of the animals as its introduction (v. 18b) and conclusion (v. 20b). In this light, the naming process serves to determine the nature of the relationship between Adam and the animals as potential partners. This requires no determination of authority roles, especially in view of the fact that by Hurley's own admission, a "helper" means an equal with no "implication of subordination" (see note 9). Hurley does not seem to be aware of the contradiction he creates for himself with the concept of Adam allegedly exercising rulership over creatures through the action of naming them, which action was divinely initiated to find him a partner that would be his equal!

Critique: According to Hurley, Adam's naming of the animals "demonstrates his control" over them (p. 211). However, Hurley does not reveal who is intended to benefit from this exhibition of power. Actually, such a demonstration of control would have been unnecessary since God had already placed the animal kingdom under human dominion as per His decree twice repeated in chapter one (Gen. 1:26, 28). A rebellious uprising might have justified a show of strength to remind the animals of who their boss was. But the text gives no hint of such a movement. Calling the serpent some appropriate names when it approached the forbidden tree would have been an infinitely more felicitous demonstration of control than browbeating unsuspecting animals when they were doing nothing wrong. All they wanted was to become "helpers," not tempters.

Critique: Should it be assumed for a moment that the naming of the animals was indeed an act of authority over them, there is nothing in the text to indicate that the naming of the woman was intended to fulfill the same function. In the Old Testament, the naming process serves a variety of purposes. Hurley does not consider those distinctions. Yet, the Genesis text requires that Adam's encounter with the animals be treated differently than his encounter with the woman. Not only was the man dealing with two different categories of being, but as the outcome demonstrates, God had a different purpose for each. One resulted in the self-definition of the man vis-a-vis the animal world and in their disqualification as "helper." The other led to his recognition of God's design and to human fulfillment. The text itself calls for this distinction. That the man "gave names" to the animals

is specifically stated in the first case (v. 20). No mention of "giving a name" is made in reference to the woman in verse 23.

Critique: Hurley's insistence that giving a name constitutes an affirmation of authority is affected by the consideration that in the Old Testament, mothers named children more often than fathers did. There are twenty five instances of women naming children for only twenty by men (cf. Otwell, And Sarah Laughed, p. 112). According to Hurley's premises, if giving a name signified assumption of authority ("the power to assign or to change a name was connected with control" [Hurley, p. 211]), mothers wielded authority in a most important area of family life more often than their husbands. This biblical fact is detrimental to Hurley's theory that man was ordained to rule over woman from their first encounter as a couple.

Critique: Hurley's contention that Adam gave the woman a name in Genesis 2:23 is unfounded.

(a) The designation "woman" was already attributed to the newly formed female prior to their encounter. The previous verse states that God had made the rib "into a woman" (v 22). In his own statement, Adam does nothing more than acknowledge God's prior designation and appropriate it for himself. He does not invent a new name for the woman. He accepts God's definition. Adam's statement is an expression of obedience, not an arrogation of rulership.

(b) In the Bible, the word woman is not a name but a common noun. The term woman is no more a proper name for the female than man is for the male. They are both generic designations used in acknowledgment of the sexual differentiation among humans. There is no attribution of a name in Adam's statement. The intent of his words is similar to Eve's exclamation at the birth of Cain: "With the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man" (Gen. 4:1). In both cases, the stress is on the awed recognition of God's handiwork.

(c) In Hebrew, the words used in Adam's statement for "woman" and for "man" have a similarity of sound comparable to their English equivalents: wo/man (ishshah) is simply the feminine form of man (ish). This near homonym serves to stress the continuity that exists between man and woman. It completes the first part of Adam's statement in this manner:

bone / of my bones
flesh / of my flesh
woman / out of man.

Adam's calling the woman by an extended form of his own self designation expresses his wonderment at God's method of creating her. The plants came "out of the ground" (2:9). The animals were formed "out of the ground" (2:19), Adam was made "of dust from the ground" (2:8). But the woman was formed of the same substance as the man. In his statement Adam does not call the woman by a name. He exclaims at the sameness that exists between the two of them.

(d) The particular word used for man (ish) in Genesis 2:23 appears for the first time at this point in the biblical text. So far he had been referred to as "the man" (adam). The word ish is an entirely new designation. If Adam's calling the woman ishshah is to be construed as an act of naming, then necessarily and by the same token, Adam, is also giving himself a new name (ish); even more so for Adam since the word ishshah had been used previously for the woman (v 22), whereas the word ish appears for the first time in Adam's statement. This being the case, whatever implications are read into Adam's "naming" of the woman, they should apply to himself as well.

Critique: Hurley makes a reference to the real instance of Adam's naming Eve (Gen. 3:20); but he confuses the issue by stating that Adam "assigns the woman a new name" to fulfill his "responsibility to act as God's subordinate ruler" (p. 212).

(a) Eve is not a new name for the woman, or an additional name. It is the only name she has been given. The name "Eve" is a proper name, not a generic designation like the common noun "woman."

(b) The contrast between Genesis 2:23 and 3:20 bears out the fact that there was no act of naming in the first instance. When Eve actually receives her name, the text uses that very word, "The man called his wife's name Eve." This is consistent with the naming of animals (2:19-20), but not with the text in 2:23.

(c) Hurley's statement according to which the naming of Eve in Genesis 3:20 was the implementation of a God given responsibility for Adam to be His subordinate ruler over the woman is misleading.

Within the creation design, it was not God's intent for Adam to rule over the woman. There was no need for such a thing, and it is not borne out in the text. Adam's rule over Eve began at the fall and as a result of it.

(d) The name given by Adam to the woman in Genesis 3:20 is a mark of honor. In a world that has become permeated with the somber reality of death, Adam recognizes in Eve the only hope for the continuance of life. The name "Eve" (hawwa) resembles in sound the word for "living" (hayya); hence, the explanation that Adam called her Eve (hawwa) "because she would become the mother of all living (hayya)." The one who had just received the sentence of death for having brought death into the world (Rom. 5:12-14) acknowledges the woman as the perpetuator of life, and therefore as the means of future redemption.

We conclude that there is no support to be found in Genesis 2:23 for the theory of male rulership over woman within the creation model.

17 This crucial text is not discussed in Hurley's book. He only makes two passing references to it in relation to other topics (p. 145, 205). One can only speculate about the reasons for this glaring omission in a work dedicated to the study of male/female relations. Obviously, the content of verse 24 militates against Hurley's interpretation of verse 23. Should the emphasis of verse 23 be seen as the naming of the woman, itself understood as Adam's exercise of rulership over her, then our text might have read, "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother, and take a wife and she shall become his obedient subordinate."

18 Our text does not even reflect the keena marriage in which the husband was co-opted by his wife's family (such as Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel [Gen. 29]). No reference is made in Genesis 2:24 to her family.

Women in Ministry and Leadership

Unit 4

Tragedy and Redemption

Development Associates International

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 4: Tragedy and Redemption

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Readings:

The Place of Women in the 21st Century—
Reports from around the world

Further Readings:

Textbook: *God’s Women Then and Now*, Chapter 6, Dr. Debbie Gill

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand and state your own assumptions about what the Bible says about women.
- Discuss the full implications of redemption after “the fall” and how that applies to the issues surrounding women in leadership and ministry.
- Identify areas where the Church may need to become more active in solving the issues of suffering and injustice faced by women

Introduction

You are about to begin studying a segment of a course called **Women in Leadership and Ministry—*Choosing the Better Part***. This unit is titled ***Tragedy and Redemption***. It is all about sin entering the earth, the redemption of mankind, and the implications this has for women.

Case Study: Rebecca’s Calling Confirmed

On Sunday Pastor Thomas sought Rebecca out after church to apologize for the outcome of the meeting earlier in the week. He assured her that he and the other leaders still needed her input and advice, even though now it would have to be delivered in a more “informal” way. Though Rebecca certainly appreciated his words, they left her feeling rather confused and frustrated. She felt as though she was back on the soccer field, recognized as one of the better players, but unable to fully participate solely because of her gender.

She was grateful, however, that at least the door was still open for some participation with the church leaders, because she couldn’t get the poor women and children in the slum so very near the church building off her mind. She still hoped to engage the church in an outreach of some type to that slum. She decided before presenting the idea to the leaders that she should first of all make a visit to the slum, talk with some of the women and have them tell her their needs from their perspective.

Though she rode the bus past that area every day, she had to admit she had never actually made a visit there. She lived in a very nice section of the city, new and slightly outside of the noise and heat. Her job as a doctor enabled her to afford a nice, though fairly simple existence. All of her friends, of course, were in a similar position. It didn’t really occur to her until she got off the bus in front of the slum district how little she knew about this area she passed daily.

The first things that assaulted her were the heat and the smells. As she began to walk into the area of crowded houses, the putrid odor of rotting food mixed with that of urine and human waste rushed up to meet her. As the flies buzzed around her face she felt her stomach tighten and her head felt a little light. Barefoot children were everywhere, holding out their hands, reaching for her bright dress and beginning to form a small parade around her as she continued slowly. Even her medical experience hadn’t really prepared her for everything she encountered.

A woman, bent nearly double, slowly sweeping the dirt in front of her shack looked up as she passed and their eyes met. Rebecca thought she had never seen such pools of misery. Though at first glance Rebecca assumed she was very old, as she looked more closely she realized that she was in fact quite young, though very thin and with skin sagging loosely from her bones.

Rebecca stopped and began to engage her in conversation. Although reluctant at first, the woman began to pour out her story in response to Rebecca’s sensitive questions. She and her two children had followed her husband to the city after he had moved there to find work several months earlier. When they arrived, they found that rather than find them an apartment as promised, he had moved in with a woman he had met and all of the money he was supposedly saving had gone to buy the local liquor. Having no where to live but no money to return to the village, she sold the only thing she had—herself, in order to buy the children food and find them shelter. Weeks later she still had no other source of income and she seemed to be too ill much of the time to “work”. Though neither she nor Rebecca voiced it, they both realized that she probably had contracted HIV-AIDS through her prostitution and would now not have long to live.

Rebecca continued through the dirt paths speaking to one woman after another. The stories all differed slightly, but misery and hopelessness permeated each. By the time Rebecca left as night was falling, she was nearly overwhelmed by all she had encountered.

It was only after she was safely back in her own home, sipping a cool and refreshing fresh lime soda, did she begin to summon the energy to process all that she had heard.

Questions filled her mind. Why the misery? Why the poverty? Didn't God care about these helpless women and children? Why did her culture give so little value to human life, especially the lives of women and children? Why weren't the social services doing something to help? Why did she have such a comfortable life by comparison? What should the Church's role be in this situation? How could the church building sit so geographically nearby, yet seem hundreds of kilometers away culturally and economically? What should she do? What should they do?

She fell into an exhausted and fitful sleep that night with many more questions than answers. As the ceiling fan swirled overhead, she realized that now she felt more responsibility than ever to involve the church in finding ways to meet some of these needs.

Lecturette:

In the first units we have looked at the creation story and why God created both men and women. As we saw there, it was His purpose to reflect His own image in them and for them to rule over this earth. In other words, they had a common Creator and a common destiny. It is incredibly important that we understand that and use that as the foundation to continue this study. In this unit we are going to look at other very familiar passages about “The fall” from Genesis and the Redemption provided by Jesus' death. Both are very familiar stories, but we need to “put on different glasses” as we read them today. These glasses are like our worldview.

Answer Box # 1

If you are in a group, look around and choose 4 people wearing glasses and have them come to the front. Now, have each one take off their glasses and trade them with someone else. Ask them to describe how they are seeing now through someone else's glasses. Is it different than usual? How different?

Worldview

As we study women throughout the Bible and God's purposes for us as women, it's important to consider our own perspective and what shapes how we interpret what we read from Scripture.

Answer Box #2

What is a “worldview”? Does everyone have a worldview? What are some of the things that shape our “worldview”?

Darrow Miller says a worldview is “A framework by which we interpret reality.” A worldview affects how we see things just as radically as exchanging glasses with someone else. Suddenly everything looks different, maybe distorted. But worldview is even more

complicated than that because we cannot simply remove it and exchange it with someone else. It is usually a part of us, made up of our culture, upbringing, the beliefs of those around us and what we have been taught. Someone has used the analogy that it is like trying to get a fish to describe the water it swims in.

Most Christian leaders take the worldview of the culture around them on the subject of women, find some scriptures that seem to support that view, and then feel like they are living out biblical truth. To be honest that is the way we often deal with many biblical issues and challenges not just the issue of gender. An example of this is the American church and slavery 100 years ago. Using the scripture: “slaves submit to your masters...” Christian leaders preached that slavery was a biblical institution!

One way to look at this is to take the Bible as a single book with many segments or “chapters”. Chapter 1 is the creation story, Chapter 2 is about the children of Israel, Chapter 3 is David’s Kingdom being established, and so forth. Of course the last chapter is Revelation and the promises to come. Very often the church just takes out one Chapter, the story of salvation, of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and ignores most of the other chapters. It takes out that one chapter and inserts it into a different book. That different book is current life and culture. The result is that yes, we receive the gospel and we are forgiven of our sins, which is incredibly important. The problem, though, is that the church adapts all the other customs and practices from the culture around it rather than taking those from the whole of Scripture. It ends up looking just like the world around it rather than reflecting God’s Kingdom here on earth. The tragic result is that it then has very little impact on the whole of society.

But the Church was designed to be counter-cultural. To live by a different set of rules and reflect the values of the Kingdom of God, rather than just absorbing the values of the culture it finds itself in. We find that throughout the Old Testament in the picture of the Israelites, who were told to never mix too closely with the pagan cultures around them. They were to live by a different standard and set of values. When they intermingled too much with the world around them, they began compromising, worshipping idols and God, etc.

The New Testament tells us to be in the world but not of it and that is the great challenge we face. How to live “set apart” for God, yet not isolate ourselves from the rest of the world, while on the other hand not mixing so completely that we blend in and no one sees a difference, because in fact there is none! Let’s keep that lense on or that set of glasses as we explore these issues of The Fall and the Redemption Jesus provided.

As we saw in Unit 1, men and women have a common Creator and common destiny. Now we’ll look at the shared tragedy they experienced and the blessing of a shared redemption from that tragedy that God provided.

Shared tragedy

Please take the time to stop and read Genesis 3:1-14.

Answer Box #3

Stop and read Genesis 3:1-14. How does this leave you feeling?

This is truly the most tragic story in the entire Scripture. Man and woman have walked and talked in the Garden with God. They were created to be in communion with Him and with each other, and to take dominion over all of God’s creation. They have just begun to fulfill that destiny when tragedy strikes. If you can read this chapter without incredible sadness you have missed the point. For man and woman to willingly choose evil instead of fulfilling their destiny is surely the most tragic story of this world—and it’s repeated daily

through our world as people are given the opportunity to choose Christ and salvation and, instead, turn their backs and choose evil.

Both Adam and Eve turned their backs to their Creator’s blessing by acts of their free will.

Let’s begin delving into this passage by asking a couple of simple questions. Stop and answer the questions in Box 4, then continue.

Answer Box #4

Could Adam have been present when the serpent was tempting Eve? Why did Adam eat of the fruit? (Refer back to Gen. 2:15 - 17) Read through Genesis 3, and also refer back to Genesis 2:15-17. What do you believe are the answers to these questions?

Do you think Adam was present when Eve was being tempted by the serpent? Well, I’ve heard people argue this from both sides and make a good case either way, but the truth is, as far as I can tell, we just don’t know. There is a lot of reason to think that possibly Adam was present. If we could read Hebrew, we would notice that the word “you” in verses 3, 4, and 5 of Genesis 3 is plural. That could indicate that the serpent was talking to more than one person.

Genesis 3:6 says that Eve gave the fruit to her husband, so he might not have been very far away. Did she just turn and give it to him or did she have to go find him? Either way, we know from Genesis 2:16,17 that Adam had clear instructions from God about not eating the fruit. So either he was tempted by the serpent’s words and ate for that reason, or he just did it because Eve asked him to, even though he knew better.

Answer Box #5

Compare Genesis 3:2,3 and Genesis 2:15-17. Do you see any discrepancy here? Do you think Eve heard the instructions directly from God for herself, or did Adam hear them and tell her?

Again it is hard to know for sure. From the order of the story in Genesis 2, it is certainly easy to assume that Eve did not hear those instructions from God because she was not yet created when he gave them, however, we don’t know for sure. That is just an assumption.

It does make one wonder though if the serpent chose to tempt Eve because she had less direct information on the subject. That she was working on second-hand information rather than first-hand information and therefore the serpent guessed she might be a bit more vulnerable. Again however, this is conjecture and the truth is we literally do not know.

More important than our conclusions about where Adam was or whether Eve heard the instructions first hand, is who did God hold guilty for eating of the fruit? Stop and answer the questions below in Box 6.

Answer Box #6

Read Genesis 3:11-19. Who did God hold guilty for eating of the fruit (verses 11-19)? Why?

Both are held guilty by God, aren't they (Genesis 3:11, 13)? When you read through that passage, it's very, very clear that God did not blame just one or the other of them, but He held them both equally responsible. What is also tragic to note is that the consequences of this sin both destroys the perfect male / female relationship and introduces shame, blame and manipulation into that relationship. You can see that in verse 12, when Adam basically says, “It's the woman's fault.” It also destroys the perfect communion between people and God, which can be seen in verse 8, when the man and woman hid themselves from God, something they had never considered doing before. The result of sin is always broken relationships.

Let's look a little more closely at the results of the sin. Stop and answer the questions in Box 7 below.

Answer Box #7

Read through Genesis 3:14-19 one more time. Think carefully here. Exactly what and who did God curse as the result of the sin of Adam and Eve?

The only times the word curse is actually used is in regard to the serpent and the ground. It does not say that Adam or Eve was cursed as a result of their sin. Let me repeat that—the curse was:

Only on the serpent and the ground,
Not on the man or woman.

Let's consider this a little deeper. Is there a difference between a curse and consequences of sin? I'm not enough of a theologian to know, but I do know that what occurs in verses 16-19 is a description of the consequences of their sin. There were certainly consequences that changed the way men and women would live and relate to each other and to God.

Based on what you read in verses 16-19, do you feel that it is God's perfect will for the husband to rule over the wife, or is it a description of the consequences of sin? Stop and read the quote in Box 8 below.

Answer Box #8

“...Can't interpret Genesis 3:16 as if it were prescriptive, rather descriptive; as if it reveals the will of a God rather than it revealing the fruit of sin, which is never the will of God. In so doing, you wrongfully attribute injustice to a holy and loving God. No where in the OT writings is there any divine injunction for wives to be in a servitude to their husbands, let alone to other men.”

Sometimes verse 16 has been used as the basis for women needing to submit to their husbands and / or all men generally, as if this is something that God wants to enforce and have the Church make happen. If that was true, wouldn't it be equally true that it is the Church's role to make work and farming in particular as difficult as possible—that good Christians should plant thorns and thistles in the fields to enforce what God said would be man's plight in verses 18 and 19? Now that seems ridiculous, doesn't it? Yet what is the difference between that and trying to say that verse 16 should be interpreted that this is God's will and therefore must be carried out? Is this part of how our worldview or our prejudices color how we interpret Scripture?

What is the net effect of these sins on the different genders? Let's go back to refresh our memories on why Man and Woman were created. There were basically two purposes:

- **Relationship with God and each other**

- **Take dominion over the earth**

Sin interfered with those two purposes. For men: The man’s abuse—dominion becomes domination. The man let his relationship with Eve overcome his sense of good and evil. The relationship aspect that he was created for got out of balance and, therefore, he lost some of that instinct. Therefore the other role, dominion, has become all consuming. In men, the God-given power and freedom to exercise **accountable dominion over creation is abused**. The propensity in men is to let their dominion run wild, to impose it in cavalier and illegitimate ways, not only on the earth and on other men, but also upon the person who is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

On the other hand, woman’s sin was to take too much dominion. Eve ate the fruit because the serpent convinced her that it would give her more power and make her like God. The resulting consequence was to lose her place and drive for dominion in the good sense. She became too consumed with the relational aspects of her calling. In women, the God-given desire for union and intimacy becomes all-consuming. The female sin is to use the **preservation of relationships as an excuse not to exercise accountable dominion** in the first place. The temptation is to avoid taking risks that might upset relationships.

Mary Stewart Van Leeuwan says this clearly in her book, *Grace and Gender*. Take a look at this quote from that book in Box 9.

Answer Box #9

“...The effects of Genesis 3:16 reflect the peculiar way in which each party sinned in the garden. The man and the woman were equally created for sociability and dominion. But in reaching out to take the fruit, the woman overstepped the bounds of accountable dominion. As a consequence, her sociability was mixed with the problem of social enmeshment, which continues to hamper the proper exercise of her dominion in the world at large. By contrast, the man in accepting the fruit from his wife, overstepped the bounds of human social unity. As a consequence, his legitimate, accountable dominion became laced with the problem of domination, which has been interfering with his relationship—to God, to the creation and to other people, including women—ever since. In each case, the punishment seems to fit the crime.”

P. 47, Mary Stewart Van Leeuwan, Gender and Grace.

The man and woman had a shared tragedy, resulting in difficult consequences, which means that they also have a shared need for a Redeemer.

Shared need for a Redeemer

Stop and read the scripture and question in Box 10 and answer that before continuing.

Answer Box #10

Who is God referring to in Genesis 3:15 when He says, “He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

God never leaves us without hope. Even in the midst of relaying the consequences of sin, God foreshadows His plan for redemption in Genesis 3:15 (also Romans 16:20).

This is the first foreshadowing of Jesus’ birth through the seed of a woman. In other words, God is going to use the woman as a tool through which His redemption will come, because He is a just and loving God.

Jesus the Redeemer

All of us as Christians understand that Jesus is our redeemer, but let’s stop and consider the term for a moment. Answer the question in Box 11 before continuing.

Answer Box #11

What does the word “Redeemer” imply? What does the term “redeem” mean? To whom and what does this apply to, in Jesus’ case?

“Redeem” means to bring things right back to where they should be. It means to reverse the effects of sin on the world. A “Redeemer” saves man from sin and the world from the effects of sin. A Redeemer is sent to bring the world to look more like the Kingdom of God and what it was created to be, to bring restoration.

Consider how this applies to women. Answer the questions in Box 12 before continuing.

Answer Box #12

So what does Jesus coming as the Redeemer imply for women? What would it mean to redeem womanhood from the effects of sin? What position would that put her in?

It would mean that she would be restored to co-ruler with men, no longer ruled over by men. Restored to the Genesis 1 position. Men and women would be in right relationship with God and with each other, and they would take their rightful places of dominion over this earth.

Let’s see if Jesus reflected this understanding of the role of women throughout His life here on earth.

Jesus’ Perspective on Women

I used to wonder why Jesus didn’t more directly proclaim freedom for women. Why didn’t He champion the cause more strongly and directly? However, if you study Scripture in the context of the day, you see that He was, indeed, radically gender unbiased.

It’s good to stay in perspective, to not get our own worldview tilted. Jesus came as the Redeemer of all mankind, not for just one gender, which in itself was radical. What Jesus offered women was treatment as equals, as valuable human beings, capable of thinking, learning and being valued. So, in fact, He was radical.

Jewish History—why so radical?

In order to understand why Jesus’ behavior was in fact radical, we have to understand the culture into which He came. In Unit 1, we saw a bit of what the Greek and Roman context was, but unfortunately the Jewish was not much better.

As Jewish history approached the time of Christ, the Rabbis codified the oral traditions into the Mishna. Then just to solidify the law, they further created the Tosefta, the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. These authoritative documents were written by the Rabbis in order to “make a fence for the Torah” or the God-given law. In this way a form of rabbinic Judaism emerged, which was increasingly legalistic, bound by endless rules and regulations of man’s making.

Examples of this rabbinic commentary helps us understand the Jewish perspective on women. Let’s read some of these together and discuss just a little. Please read through the following examples:

1. Eve was cursed with ten curses. The last three among these were, “She is wrapped up like a mourner, banished from the company of all men, and confined within a prison.” In other words, when in public she was to always have her head covered like a woman in mourning; though the men were allowed the right to have several wives, woman could not have multiple husbands; and she was to live a life restricted to private, domestic roles. The rabbis thus managed to give **divine sanction to their double standards.**

2. “For evil are women, my children; and since they have no power or strength over man, they use wiles by outward attractions. For the angel of the Lord told me, that **women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men**, and in their heart they plot against men; and by means of their adornment they deceive first their minds... For a woman cannot force a man openly, but by a harlot’s bearing she beguiles him. Flee, therefore, fornication, my children, and command your wives and your daughters, that they adorn not their heads and faces to deceive the mind; because every woman who useth these wiles hath been reserved for eternal punishment. (Testament of Reuben 5:1-5.)

3. “**Divorce occurs solely at the husband’s option.**” Wife are considered property, so logically a piece of property cannot divorce its owner.

4. **Study of the law for women is severely discouraged.** “If any man give his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery.” “Let the words of Torah be burned up, but let them not be delivered to women.” The study of Torah is as central to religious life of a Jew as prayer. Exemption from this study was tantamount to the exclusion from the best that life could offer.

5. “It is a disgrace to be the father of an undisciplined son, and the birth of a daughter is a loss.” (Sirach 22:3)... “Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; and it is a woman who brings shame and disgrace.” Sirach from the apocryphal. **Female sin is worse than male sin? Contrast that with Paul**, “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:22b - 24)

This Jewish perspective on women is indeed shocking, isn’t it. It doesn’t reflect the beauty of creation that is in Scripture, in Genesis, does it. Instead the Rabbis took the way women were viewed in the culture around them and added it to their law. This is not so different from what Church leaders today have a tendency to do, what we have a tendency to do. It’s shocking when we see it in that culture. Maybe we should consider the treatment of women by the church today equally shocking.

Jesus in contrast

Let’s look at some familiar Bible stories and see how Jesus treated women. Was He more like the Jewish, Greek or Roman cultures, or did He show a very different approach to women, one in which they were valued and equal? Read the scripture passage in Box 13 below and answer the questions.

Answer Box # 13

Read the story of the adulterous woman in John 8:2-11.

Why is it the story of the adulterous “woman”? How can one person be adulterous? If they caught her “in the very act,” where was the man they caught with her?

What was Jesus’ response to this woman? Grace, not justice—very radical. The Jews’ cultural double standard made them blind to injustice. It didn’t even occur to them that the man caught with her “in the act” of adultery would be equally guilty. This is a clear example of “worldview” at work. Can you think of similar examples in your culture? What about the female infanticide in some countries today? Why are female babies unwanted and sometimes killed? Why do they have no value?

Marriage and Divorce

When Jesus taught on marriage and divorce, His teaching was **radical because it presupposed that men and women were equal**. In Mark 10:2-12, Jesus’ teaching on marriage and divorce basically “leveled the playing field,” putting men and women on an equal level. Look at verse 12, where Jesus indicates a woman could divorce her husband. The concept was shocking in Jewish culture, where women were chattels and men could divorce them at will, but women could never divorce a man. If we didn’t understand the culture of the day, we wouldn’t realize how radical this is.

Stop and read through the scripture in Box 14 and answer the questions there.

Answer Box # 14

Read through the story of the woman healed in Luke 13:10-17. Why was Jesus’ action in this story so radical?

Just Jesus’ invitation for the woman to come forward challenged all the male cultural domination of the time. He was in the synagogue, so she must have come into the male section when Jesus called her up.

Jesus’ final comment, in verse 16, is the most radical of all. Jesus calls her a “daughter of Abraham”! Completely unheard of! Jewish men were son’s of Abraham, but to call a woman a daughter of Abraham was turning the culture upside down. It was again, leveling the playing field and making men and women of equal value.

Baptism for Circumcision

Another really interesting symbolic change with the coming of Jesus was the symbol of inclusion into the Body of believers. For redeemed Christians it is Baptism (Matthew 28:19-20). Before that time—before redemption, the only physical sign of inclusion in the Jewish religion was circumcision, a uniquely male sacrament. With the coming of Jesus (actually it was started by his forerunner, John the Baptist), circumcision was replaced by baptism, a gender inclusive sacrament, as the public sign of incorporation into the people of God.

Woman integral in Jesus’ time

The most striking thing about the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus is the simple fact that they are there! That they were valued, equal, worthy of conversation and integration.

He taught them the gospel—radically different than the Jewish approach, which found teaching women the law improper and even obscene.

Jesus did **not choose the temple as His primary venue for teaching**, but was primarily outside, etc. where women were allowed. Consider the story of Mary and Martha in Box 15 below and answer the question.

Answer Box # 15

Compare the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42 with the quote from the Jewish Mishnah below. What was Jesus’ perspective on teaching women?

“Let thy house be a meeting-house for the Sages and sit amid the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst” “Let thy house be opened wide and talk not much with womankind...He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the law and at the last will inherit Gehenna.” (the Jewish Mishnah)

This is an amazing example of Jesus’ inclusion of women. The scene is described by saying that Mary sat at the Lord’s feet. This is actually an idiomatic expression that conveyed a formal discipling relationship, like a rabbinic pupil. Jesus, the great teacher, accepted women as being worth teaching, being His disciples, and relating to Him on that level.

A similar example is Martha, when she came out to meet Him at **Lazarus’ death** (John 11:20-26). Over the next few verses, Jesus—alone with Martha—engages her in one of the most significant dialogues in the gospels. Together they grapple with theological truth in the midst of their shared pain over the loss of Lazarus. “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’” (John 11:25-26)

This central tenant of our faith, this intimate, self-revelation of Jesus was not taught to the twelve. It was taught to a woman disciple!

Of course, one of the most famous examples of Jesus’ interaction with a woman is the story of the Samaritan woman. Stop and consider it as you read the scripture from Box 16 below and answer the question carefully before continuing.

Answer Box # 16

Read the story of the Samaritan Woman (John 4:4-42)
What are the factors in Jesus’ behavior that make this story so radical?

I hope you were able to put a different “lens” on this story as you read it this time. There are many things that make the story of the Samaritan woman radical. For instance, it is a great story of cultural insensitivity. Sometimes in our quest to be socially relevant, we are afraid to break certain cultural rules as Christians, especially when it comes to including women in roles of leadership and value. But Jesus was not at all held back in this story by anyone’s cultural expectations

Look at Box 17 and the reasons why the story of the Samaritan woman is so radical. First, it is the longest recorded private conversation Jesus has with an individual—and it was a woman! Not only was she a woman but she was a marginalized woman, a Samaritan sinner that no one thought was worthy of much of anything. Jesus took her very seriously. He didn’t make fun of her, consider her beneath Him, but rather asked her questions, cared about her answers and thought she was worth His time and energy.

The Story of the Samaritan Woman is radical because:

- *It’s the longest recorded private conversation Jesus had with an individual.*
- *She was a marginalized woman.*
- *Jesus took her seriously.*
- *He spent time with her.*
- *He makes one of the most significant statements about God in the whole of Scriptures, “God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).*
- *This encounter is as significant as the one He had just had with Nicodemus—one of the top Jewish leaders.*
- *She turns into an evangelist. Vs 42—a whole town believes because*

The next thought is that He took time with her. Here was a major leader, a prophetic teacher who many important people wanted to see and spend time with, but He took out time to spend with a “simple woman.”

Jesus considers her capable of understanding one of the deepest truths of Scripture when He talks about God being spirit. This time spent with her truly was as significant as the time He spent with a key Jewish ruler, Nicodemus.

The wonderful result is that she becomes an evangelist. Jesus chose to entrust the message that He came to earth for with a simple sinner woman of Samaria.

There are many, many more encounters between Jesus and women that are radical in the gospels, but we won’t take more time in this unit to explore them. Generally speaking, it is interesting to note that over and over women were a part of the intimate group that traveled with Jesus.

Three examples:

1. Women were a regular and constant part of Jesus ministerial entourage (Luke 8:1-3). “The women,” like the apostles, spent regular time with Jesus
2. Jesus entrusted the first proclamation of His resurrection to a woman—Mary Magdalene (John 20:17).
3. Easter morning the women were instructed to go proclaim (Matt 28:10)—little point in asking whether women should preach when Jesus sent them out to preach to the apostles the reality of the resurrection.

There is one more Scripture in seeing how Jesus related to women that is terribly important to consider. Please complete Box 18 below.

Stop and read Luke 11:27-28. What was the issue Jesus was trying to get at when He gave His response in this story?

A woman called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” In Jesus’ response, He rejects this destiny-restricting world view. “He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it’”(Luke 11:28). Personal obedience to the word of God is the basis of blessedness—therefore **the issue is not, “Are you male or**

female?” The issue is, “have you been faithful to the call of God upon your life?” The Jewish culture would say that a woman’s only value came from having a male child. But Jesus said no—value is based on obedience. This is equally true for both men and for women. For all who obey His word, there is no God-given limit on the God-given destiny.

Jesus lived out His life as a radical reflection of the values of the Kingdom of God rather than bowing to the cultural norms of the day. He modeled what we, as Christians, are to do with our lives. His death, the ultimate sacrifice, was the redemption of all of mankind from sin, including the results of the sin of Adam and Eve. His death restored our right relationship with God, took away the effects of sin on the world and gave us the chance to be a part of restoring the Kingdom of God on this earth.

This is what the Church is called to, to be a mirror image of the Kingdom of God so that people will be attracted to Jesus and find redemption from their sins. In order for the Church to do this as completely and accurately as possible we must be radical, we must look different than the sinful cultures we find ourselves in.

One aspect of this is how we, as the Church, treat women. Will we accept Jesus’ model and treat them differently than the culture, offering them hope, dignity, an equal place, and the right to take their place and obey the calling God puts on each one of their lives? Or will we just reflect whatever culture we live in and treat women with the same disdain, limits and values that our culture does? As Christian leaders the choice is in our hands.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

1. *Think about the Christian organization or church you are in and give leadership to. Are there any common practices reflecting an attitude that women are not as valuable as, or capable as, or equal to men? List any common practices that come to mind that may not be biblical reflections of the Kingdom of God as Jesus modeled it by His interactions with women. Now, pray about whether or not you should consider bringing change in any of these practices if it is in your power to do so.*
2. *Read back through the story of Rebekah in this unit and consider her questions in light of the redemption Jesus brought. Should the Church be involved in alleviating the suffering faced by many women in the world today? Why or why not? Is there anything that you and/or your church can do to be involved immediately?*

Readings

The Place of Women in the 21st Century—Reports from around the world

The following articles have been taken from various publications in the year 2000. They reflect some of the serious issues of injustice and suffering affecting women today—direct confirmation of the ongoing effects of “The Fall.” Often religious beliefs and ignorance combine to make the plight of women even worse. As you read through these reports, consider what the role of the Christian church should be with regard to these issues. In other words, what would Jesus do?

Child Killing – Female Infanticide:

A two day old girl child was killed at Edapady, Salem district on 21st July, by its grandmothers on instructions from its parents. The two women and the girl’s mother were arrested. A fortnight old female infant was found thrown in a dust bin by the parents themselves. In the rural areas of Salem, Namakkal and Dharmapuri districts of Tamilnadu, female infanticide has become ‘routine’ affair. (New India Express, 22 & 23 July, 2000)

Taliban Arrest U.S. Aid Worker for Hiring Women

Kabul, Afghanistan – A U.S. aid worker has been arrested because she employs Afghan women, a crime under the ruling Taliban’s strict interpretation of Islam, international aid workers in the Afghan capital said Monday.

Mary Macmakin, who is in her late 60s, is director of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Support For Afghanistan, based out of Bisbee, Arizona.

She was arrested Sunday along with 15 Afghan nationals, including seven women, who did not want to be identified for fear they would get in trouble with the hard-line Taliban army, aid workers said.

A Taliban security guard at a minimum security prison confirmed the arrest.

In Washington, a U.S. State Department official said word has been received from U.N. officials in Afghanistan that Macmakin is safe and unharmed.

The official said the United States has been in contact with the Taliban and demanded the woman’s immediate release.

Macmakin’s organization provides assistance to poor Afghan women. She has worked in Afghanistan for nearly a decade, seeking to provide women, particularly widows, with work at home to help them earn an income to feed their families.

Ravaged by poverty and war, the majority of the 750,000 people living in Kabul depend on international aid.

Since taking control of Kabul in 1996, the Taliban have banned women from working and girls from attending school, and many of their Islamic edicts are directed at women.

They require women to wear the all-encompassing burqa and to travel with a male relative.

Women are beaten for defying the orders.

There were indications the Taliban was preparing for a crackdown.

According to some aid workers, the Taliban sent a letter to the U.N. office in Afghanistan last week, saying international aid organizations were defying the ban on women working.

The United States prohibits government officials and diplomats from entering Afghanistan.

Women Stolen to become Wives—Life in the Kyrgyz culture as described by an American missionary living there

...Jidegul’s fear: Being stolen. One of the darker aspects of Kyrgyz culture is that if a man sees a woman he wants for his wife, he can simply take her. Sometimes he will go

through his parents to arrange the marriage, but even then, the girl may not meet him or know him. Where we're going is much more Kyrgyz and Asian than Bishkek is, and Jidegul knows that every day she is home there is a greater risk of being seen and stolen.

She doesn't actually want to spend any time in the village—but plans for us to go immediately up to the high mountain pastures, out of the sight of men, where we will take care of sheep and horses and prepare Kyrgyz foods. She has told me that we will not walk around the village much, and we must be in the house by 5 every evening. This is the fear that young Kyrgyz girls live with.

Last summer several men approached her and her family, she ran and hid from some. Later, she heard a few of these men stole wives from neighboring villages. Her sister was stolen a few times, but the family managed to rescue her, finally telling her she MUST choose a husband, because they couldn't keep on rescuing her like that. They have told Jidegul she must find a husband in the next year, or they will arrange a match for her. She is 19. Would you pray that God would put his hand of protection over her, that HE will be the matchmaker for her, and find a husband who seeks after his face and will be a husband Jidegul can love and submit to? I have heard so many horror stories of women being stolen by bad men (usually it's the bad men who have to steal, as the families won't agree to a match), that the thought of it happening to Jidegul makes me want to weep.

Report of one Aid Worker from Afghanistan

... The suppression of women's rights in Afghanistan, unlike many people believe, is relatively new. Up to the early 1980's women were working in offices, dressing in western fashion and were free to walk the streets. The same was true for men; they wore a suit and tie to work, and looked quite western. It was not until the Mujahideen came into Kabul to fight the Soviet invasion that women's rights started to deteriorate.

The Mujahideen (Arabic word, literally means freedom fighters) quickly brought strict Islamic rule on Afghanistan. A Jihad (religious war) was placed on the Soviets, this was the beginning of Afghanistan's 22-year civil war.

Currently, to talk about women's rights in Afghanistan is a touchy subject; most men believe that a woman should never be seen in public, especially their face. If you ask them why, they say it's in accordance to the Koran. This view is hypocritical because 25 years ago Afghanistan was an Islamic State and women still had rights.

Women today are required to wear a "borka," which covers them completely from head to toe. They are never allowed to work, and in Taliban areas they are beaten if they step outside their home. If a woman commits adultery she will be publicly stoned until she dies. Many Afghan women have attempted to commit suicide to avoid forced marriages by their family.

Although I work in Afghanistan, I think it would be hard for me to ever articulate the true nature of Afghan culture for it is very complicated. I was motivated to write this based on an experience today involving two middle-aged women.

It started this morning when I was standing out front of our office, when I noticed two women in "borkas" walking cautiously towards our office. When they finally approached me I greeted them; they began to talk to me in Persian. I explained I could not understand them, and told them to wait a minute. Our guards came at the same time and ordered them to leave. I instructed them to wait before doing so, and went to get my translator.

If I would not have been there in the first place, the guards would have ordered them to leave regardless of their reasons, and I never would know about it.

I asked the women what the problem was; they explained they came from Dust-I-Archi, a two day walk from Khowaja Ghar, and they were in search of food. They went to every organization along the way; all of them dismissed their needs. Their husbands were killed when the Taliban attacked the area; together they have 14 dependents and no source of income.

They had four sons who were in their 20's, the Taliban in full view of the family held their sons to the ground, and removed their eyes with a knife, of course they later died. After being forced to watch the Talibs kill their sons in such a gruesome, ruthless manor, they killed their husbands in a way I can't nor want to describe. Now as widows, they cannot work because of the current situation. Their oldest child is only ten years old; he is forced to work to provide at most five dollars of month. Of course this is not nearly enough money for fourteen dependents.

These women came to us asking for assistance; their clothes were rugged, there face and hands were almost all bones, and they had not eaten in nine days. They were starving because they gave everything they had to their children. One of the women started to cry because I reminded her of her dead son who was twenty.

This situation repeats itself daily, except it's not always so personal. The difficult situation is if we provide food aid for these women, we will have 200 families overnight camping outside our office, asking for us to give food to them too. We are not equipped to distribute food aid, but I could not tolerate seeing such hardship.

I asked our staff to gather any extra money they could give. I gave the rest of my money and totally we gave enough to buy 20 kilograms of rice (44.4 pounds). We also told them to come in a week so we could prepare 120 pounds of wheat, and clothes for their children. This is nothing; the food will last not more than a month, but it is better than nothing. WorldConcern gave the clothes for distribution to refugees, but we decided to give some to their family.

The hardest part about this is, in the long run they will be in the same situation. They still will have no income or way to work; it is likely that the mothers will soon die. The women were starving; there is nothing they can do about it, and the sad truth is they will probably pay a visit to God soon. This is the reality of Afghanistan: the husbands and children die in fighting, this creates workless women to try and raise a family. The families who cannot find support die, leaving a handful of orphans to be the next generation of Afghans.

Women in Ministry and Leadership

Unit 5

How Do We Interpret God's Word for Today?

Development Associates International

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 5: How Do We Interpret God’s Word for Today?

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Readings:

How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible, Second Edition By Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart - Chapter 1: Introduction: The Need to Interpret

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- State the key principles or rules one needs to follow when interpreting the meaning and applying the texts of the Bible.
- Assess the value of Fee and Stuart’s approach to interpreting scripture.
- Discuss Paul’s background as an aid to us in our study of his Epistles.

Introduction

You are about to begin studying a segment of a course called **Women in Leadership and Ministry-Choosing the Better Part**. This unit is titled *How Do We Interpret God’s Word?* It highlights that the very need for interpretation is in the nature of Scripture itself. And it explores some of the rules that are needed to insure proper understanding and application of the Scriptures.

Case Study: Rebecca Finds a Mentor

Rebecca’s world seemed to be caving in. It had been several months ago since the elders meeting, but she could not get the scene out of her head. The humiliation, the shame, embarrassment and anger still ran strong within. What they had said basically was that she was a second-class person. Because of gender alone her disqualification from leadership was sealed. Scripture had been quoted, heads had nodded in agreement and she was out. It seemed so unjust and short sighted. She processed her confusion with God and asked him to help her understand if the Scriptures quoted to her were really to be applied to her in this way.

As she sat in her apartment twirling her long dark hair between her fingers, she knew she needed somehow to find answers, maybe not all the answers, but at least enough to help her get back on the right path. But where could she go, who could she talk to. She did not want to seem immature, but this issue of her identity, her Christian walk and how she would ever use the gifts and fulfill her calling in Christ were supremely critical issues.

It was several weeks later, Rebecca had gotten busy with her practice, calls at the hospital, and she had once again buried her feelings under a load of work. At her office she was looking over her patient list and noticed that Elisabeth Aziz was scheduled for that afternoon. She knew Elisabeth from church; she was one of those ladies who wore a sense of peace and graciousness. Her husband was a professor at the university and taught at the local seminary, but other than that she really did not know them well.

Rebecca was surprised as she walked into the consulting room to see both Elisabeth and Dr. Aziz sitting in the chairs waiting. After brief greetings she got down to business. Elisabeth had not been feeling well for some time, Dr. Aziz seemed more worried than Elisabeth. He seemed to be a very caring and gentle man. Rebecca caught herself smiling. Dr. Aziz was the classic absent-minded professor. His hair looked as if it had been weeks with out being brushed properly, he wore a rumpled pair of trousers and a shirt that had several cheap ball point pens hanging from the well used pocket. His bushy eyebrows would have seemed menacing were it not for his warm, peaceful eyes and gentle brow. Dr. Aziz paced the room while Rebecca asked Elisabeth several questions and did an initial examination.

After several trips and a rather long set of testing, the Aziz’s started to become friends. Rebecca felt relieved when the tests came back for Elisabeth. There was no life threatening condition and with some medication Elisabeth should be back to full strength soon.

She decided to stop by the Aziz’s apartment on her way home to tell Elisabeth the good news. Their place was on her way home. No reason to hurry back to my flat she thought, there was only an empty, lonely set of rooms waiting for her. Besides over the weeks they had spent together she found she rather liked the gentle Elisabeth and the eccentric doctor. Before she dropped by to tell Elisabeth the results she stopped at a local café for a drink and to collect her thoughts. Since she had met Dr. Aziz and Elisabeth she had a very warm feeling towards them. They were so kind toward each other. She wondered if she was attaching feelings she might have had for her father, if she had known him, to Dr. Aziz. Elisabeth could have been every ones mother, so sweet and caring. They had raised four children of their own she had learned, now grown and living abroad. She felt safe and

accepted when she was with them. Perhaps Dr. Aziz would be someone I could talk to, he seems very knowledgeable and more important, understanding.

As Rebecca turned the corner and headed down the road where the Aziz’s had their flat, she was having second thoughts and had decided not to ask Dr. Aziz anything. She would give them the welcome report and leave. How could she ever find the inner strength to share so personally, besides she was a professional and must keep a distance from her patients.

She rang the bell and Dr. Aziz opened the door. Immediately his eyes showed fear and concern to see Rebecca at the door. He expected the worst. Elisabeth came down the hall soon after and invited Rebecca into the parlor. As they sat Dr. Aziz couldn’t wait to ask, “Was the news bad?”

“No”, Rebecca answered. She then explained the results and told Elisabeth that with proper medication she should be fine. Everyone was so relieved. Elisabeth insisted on making tea for everyone and left the room, Rebecca thought about protesting but in the end said nothing.

Rebecca suddenly found herself sitting with Dr. Aziz alone. Dr. Aziz was standing at the window, hands clasped behind his back, looking out the window. Without turning around he spoke to Rebecca. “You are carrying a very heavy burden my dear, I can see the pain in your eyes and feel your despair. I certainly do not want to intrude in your private life but Elisabeth and I would count it an honor to talk and pray with you and help however we can. We so appreciate the way you have cared for Elisabeth, you have been so very kind. Would you like to talk about what is troubling your soul?” His voice was so gentle and kind, that whatever fears Rebecca had dissolved. She began haltingly telling of her confusion and her hurts from the elder board, questions about a women’s role and the scripture, the feelings of being wounded and sadness in her spirit. At some point Elisabeth returned with the tea, sat it on the table and quietly sat next to Rebecca and gently put her hand on her arm.”

“Through the tears Rebecca shared all the pent up anger and feelings of despair and the loneliness, the deep sense of having no self value, no self worth. She had never told anyone of the rape and pregnancy and abandonment of her son, but it all poured out, she sobbed and sobbed. Rebecca turned and buried her head in Elisabeth’s lap, she felt so ashamed, so deeply shamed. She did not know how long it lasted but, but eventually the tears stopped, the sobbing subsided and she regained her composure. Elisabeth had gone to get some tissues. I must look like a total mess she thought to herself.

She immediately felt bad that she had unburdened herself. Until she looked up and saw the look on Dr. Aziz’s face. She could only describe it as profound sadness. Sad, moist eyes, the corners of his wrinkled mouth were turned down and even his bushy eyebrows were drooping. Elisabeth sat with her head bowed, silent tears running down her own face.

No one spoke or moved for a very long time. It was not an awkward silence, no one seemed in a hurry to say or do anything. There was, in a strange way, a peace that blanketed the room.

“Rebecca, my child, I am so profoundly sorry for the things you have gone through.” His voice was low and comforting. She felt a wonderful strange sense of oneness with Dr. Aziz. When he said “my child” she smiled slightly, she was 32 years old, but the sound of those words soothed her soul, like a warm hand placed on a child’s heart, she had never heard them said with such love and tenderness. “

He went on quickly, “Rebecca if you are willing to be a diligent student I would be proud to work with you in discovering some very wonderful truths about God and his word. It will be a wonderful journey of self discovery, I will not tell you the answers, a good teacher never does, but I will guide you and ask the questions and give you the information you need to find the truth. Of course it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to discover Gods’ truth but we must also be good stewards and use faithfully the gifts God has given us. I am referring of course to our minds and intellects. So this will not be easy, but nothing of value ever is” Dr. Aziz was looking at her now very intensely, his eyes almost ablaze with excitement and enthusiasm “Rebecca are you interested in making the journey of your life, a journey that is some ways will never end?”

Rebecca agreed to Dr. Aziz’s offer. The next week she was early for her meeting with Dr. Aziz. She came with questions fuelled during the week by her reading and re-reading the portions of scripture regarding the role of women. Some of the passages she read were not all that clear as to exactly what they meant. And she wanted to know, how we interpret Gods word for today. Is there only one way to interpret certain passages? Her mind was racing ahead. She read the passages in Corinthians and First Timothy in several versions and they still were pretty clear. A woman was to be silent in church how are these to de interpreted?

As soon as she seated herself she did not wait for Dr. Aziz to begin, but blurted out, “Dr. Aziz there is no hope I have read these passages over and over and they seem so clear, Paul forbids women from speaking in church or to have any leadership as far as I can tell. Maybe we should just forget the whole idea, all the translations are the same or very similar. I don’t think there is much hope.”

Dr. Aziz smiled at the opportunity her apparent dead end presented to him. He began, “some things are not always what they seem at first glance, Rebecca. To gain understanding it is necessary to follow the appropriate steps of interpretation and application referred to as exegesis and hermeneutics.

Lecturette:

We have come to the part of our study on women in ministry and leadership where we need to study the key passages in the New Testament. All of these passages are in the letters of Paul, and are sometimes referred to as the difficult passages. They are considered difficult because it is necessary to understand both the historical/cultural context as well as Greek grammar in order to properly understand and apply them. In this unit we aim to explore some of the general principles of how to read and apply the Bible. This will help us to understand and apply these passages of Paul.

General Principles of Interpretation and Application

As one of your authors for this course, let me tell you a bit about myself as we begin this section on interpretation and application. I grew up in a mostly Irish Catholic family in the US and became a Christian when I was 18 years old while I was studying science at University. I was introduced to Jesus through the rock opera “Jesus Christ Superstar” accompanied by a thorough search of the gospels. It was then that I discovered the Word of God was powerful and active. This simple study of the Word began a process of change in me to become more alive, full of joy and hope. I remember thinking what is it about this book that has such impact!! I was fascinated by the Word. I loved it. I wanted to understand all of it. I wanted to teach it to others so they too could experience its liberating power.

Soon after my conversion, I transferred from University to a Christian Liberal Arts College to pursue the study of the Scriptures. My dear father gave me his blessing to make this change but he did have a few reservations. One morning he asked me “Maureen, what kind of job will you be able get after you finish your studies?” “Job”, I said, “I do not know! I am not sure what women can do in the protestant church!”

Well, soon enough I discovered there were different opinions about this. And I realized although it was important to seek out godly counsel on the subject from men and women who had studied it, I had to come to my own conclusions. In order to do this, I learned these principles of how to interpret and apply the Scriptures that I am now about to pass on to you.

One of the authors of our reading for this unit is Dr. Gordon Fee. Dr. Fee is a wonderful man of God whose scholarship I have come to trust throughout the years. I sat with him on a few occasions and asked him many questions, especially in those early years of my Christian walk. You see I was sorting out my calling. What was I to do with my life? I recognized a burning passion in my heart for the Scriptures, a strong desire to know them and to impart them to others. I was encouraged by many that I had a speaking/teaching gift and I had to know to whom and in what context God would have me use that gift. I had to know “did I really have to be silent in church? Could I never teach a man? and more.....THE

LAST THING I WANTED TO DO WAS DISOBEY GOD AND THE VERY WORD I LOVED. So Dr. Fees input, teaching, and books have helped me greatly. His article at the end of this Unit will expand on the principles of how to read and study the Scriptures. Please do take the time read it as well.

We will now begin our study looking at the very Nature of Scripture itself.

The Nature of the Scripture

As Christians we believe the Bible is (1) inspired by the Holy Spirit, (2) authoritative and (3) provides us with all we need to know for life and godliness. We believe it is our duty and responsibility to consistently search the Scriptures for ourselves and make life applications. We are grateful that so much of the Bible can be clearly understood and applied.

However, we have already seen that Christians do come to different conclusions about some Biblical passages. The subject of this course is an example of this. Although some topics on which there is disagreement make very little practical difference as to how we live our lives, there are a few subjects that demand we draw conclusions and make application. Our topic is an example of the latter.

Answer Box # 1

Can a woman be a leader in the church? Can she make a public contribution in ministry and worship? Can she teach men? Is it the calling of every wife to simply make her husband successful? These are only some of the questions regarding our subject. Take a few minutes and identify specific questions each of the following would need to answer for themselves. And explain why it is so important that they need to know the answers. What difference does it make in their every day lives. What eternal difference does it make? You don't need to decide the answers yet. Just list the questions that they need to have clear answers for.

*Pastor/Leader
Christian man/husband*

The need for every Christian to draw conclusions about this is obvious. After all, a woman has to decide what she will do with the capacities and gifts God has given her. She needs to know for what God will hold her accountable. And a Pastor must decide if God will reward or reprimand him for what he does or does not allow a woman to do. On these issues there is no neutral ground.

I remember the day I sat in my senior Pastors office and shared with him my sense that God was calling me to full time ministry. I loved and respected my Pastor. His opinion meant a lot to me, even more than his opinion I desired his blessing and the blessing of my church. Well, he asked some hard questions. He challenged me to think about my motives. He asked me if there was anything else I could imagine myself doing. He talked to me about servanthood, selflessness, and more. He reminded me of my education in science and all the money I could make if I pursued a professional career. He even warned me by saying “most men are not looking for a wife who preaches better than them!” But never once did he suggest my gender might disqualify for service! He even went on to help me develop my abilities by giving me opportunities to preach and teach. Now, more than 30 years later, I have had the privilege of serving thousands of Christians in more than 90 countries. Someday my Pastor, who is now in his 80s, will stand before Jesus and he will hear something like “well done my good and faithful servant, for you have been a good pastor for my daughter, Maureen.” I do not know what would have happened if my Pastor had said “a women is not able to teach or have authority over a man”. Because I loved and trusted him, I think I might have give up my passion to become a Bible teacher and become an animal doctor.

As we saw in an earlier unit, many times the reason Christians hold different views is due to the lack of agreement on how to interpret and/or apply the Scriptures. “But don’t the

Scriptures simply mean what they say” you ask? Well, no not always and that is by God’s design. The Scriptures are a record of what God spoke to real people in real situations in the language and literary forms they were used to. Hebrew Poetry (the psalms) was a familiar way for Jews to express heart felt worship and dialogue with God. Codes of Law (Ten Commandments) were familiar ways to set expectations for the way a community was to function. God’s aim was to make the Scripture personal, readable and applicable to those who originally received it; therefore applying it today is not always straight forward.

Our task as we read and study the Bible today is to first understand what was communicated to them and then to decide how it applies to us. This process is referred to by scholars as exegesis and hermeneutics. We will simply call it interpretation and application. Dr Fee explains the need for Interpretation like this.

“The need to interpret lies in the nature of Scripture itself. Historically, the church has understood the nature of Scripture much the same as it has understood the person of Christ--the Bible is at the same time both human and divine. As Professor George Ladd once put it, “the Bible is the Word of God given in the words of [people] in history.” In fact, not only is the Bible God’s word written by people to people in general, it was written to specific people addressing them in their situation. It is this dual nature of the Bible that demands of us the task of interpretation.”

In other words the Bible is *God’s Word*. And it has *eternal relevance*; it speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture. Because it is God’s Word, we must listen--and obey. But because God chose to speak his Word through *human words in history*, every book in the Bible also has *historical particularity*; each document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written (and in some cases also by the oral history it had before it was written down). Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the “tension” that exists between its *eternal relevance* and its *historical particularity*.

Interpretation (Exegesis)

Sometimes people fear the process of interpretation because it implies people can make the Scripture mean whatever they want it to mean and most of us have experienced examples of that! However, sound interpretation and application is governed by a set of rules which, when used properly, keep the interpreter from reading their own meaning into the text.

We all, to some degree, automatically apply these rules whenever we read the Bible. Consider this: we easily understand Paul **not only** expected the Philippians to “stop complaining and arguing...” (Phil 2:15) but he expects all Christians to do the same. On the other hand we understand Paul **only** expected Timothy to bring John Mark and his cloak and scrolls when he came to visit Paul.

(2 Tim 4:11-13) We are not expected to apply this today.

Answer Box # 2

Examine Phil 2:15 and 2 Tim 4:11-13 more closely and identify what rules we use to decide which one is applicable to us and which one is not.

In order to ensure sound interpretation and application of the Bible, we need to understand what the original author intended to say to the particular group/person to whom he was writing. We need to try to step into their shoes and hear it as they heard it. Only after we do this can we consider the question of whether or not this applies to us today and how.

To understand what the writer meant to the original receivers, we must consider both the historical/cultural context and the literary context.

Historical/Cultural Context

Consider the simple instructions given at the end of some of Paul’s letters: “greet the saints with a holy kiss”. How can the historical/cultural context help us to understand and apply this? If we were to take this literally every Christian everywhere would be expected to greet another Christian with a “holy kiss”. But was that really Paul’s intention? Is this really about the form of the greeting (kiss) or is about the need to greet one another warmly and with affection?

Clearly a kiss was a form of greeting in their culture, similar to the kind of greeting one might receive in some European or Latin cultures today. Paul was not telling them to greet with a kiss as opposed to hand shake or bow. He was not instructing them on the form of greeting. He was simply reminding them to greet one another warmly in the way that was familiar to them.

The application for us today is to greet other Christians warmly in a way that is appropriate in their culture. (A holy kiss may not be appropriate and in fact it could get you into trouble!)

Another example of how an understanding of history and culture can help to interpret and apply the Bible is from 1 Timothy where Paul instructs “men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without arguing or disputing.” (1 Tim 2:8).

Answer Box # 3

Consider 1 Tim 2:8

- *Who is Paul addressing and what is it that he wants them to understand and apply.*
- *What is the application today and for whom?*

What was Paul’s point? Was he giving instructions about posture or attitude or both? In the culture in Paul’s day men always did pray with their hands lifted. Paul was simply describing what they already were doing in his effort to address the attitude with which they were doing it. His point was when they do pray (with their hands lifted) **they do so without arguing and disputing.**

How do we bring this point into our situation today? Well no matter the posture men take when they pray they are to pray without argument and dispute. What about women? Do you think Paul would approve of women praying regardless of their heart attitude? Of course not! Paul is addressing a real situation in this church. And he is bringing correction to real people who have issues. And it appears there is a significant enough group of men in this church who needed to be singled out and corrected.

What about the lifting of hands when you pray? How might we apply this today? Well, we could use this verse to show that this is an acceptable posture for prayer. However, we could NOT conclude it was the **only** way to pray, or that only men should lift their hands.

Answer Box # 4

Stop and think of another scripture that can be easily misunderstood if the historical/cultural context is not taken into consideration. Now, show how understanding the history/culture helps to understand and apply it.

This verse is not about posture, it is about attitude.

Proper interpretation of the Scripture requires someone who not only knows the language, in this case Greek, but also the historical setting, culture, political factors, topography and any other particular circumstances. What did it mean then and is there another way of asking the question? What was the point intended for the original readers?

We will explore the historical and cultural context of Paul for each of the passages we study in the units ahead in order to better understand and apply each passage in our lives.

Literary context

The Bible is a collection of different genres of literature such as narrative, poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, epistles and more. As well, the writers use different forms of speech like, metaphors, hyperbole, satire and more. Not all forms of literature are to be taken literally.

Consider when Jesus said “If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.” (Matt 5:30) Now if we took this verse literally, most Christians would be missing some body parts! Thankfully, Jesus did not intend this to be taken literally.

Answer Box # 5

Explain why most Christians do not take Matt 5:30 literally?

This saying is in the form of a hyperbole: an exaggerated statement to make the point that it is impossible for us to deal with sin by simply removing those parts that cause the sin.

There are rules for interpretation for every literary form of Scripture. It is essential we follow these rules in our effort to understand it and make life application. The book “How to Read the Bible for All It’s Worth?” explains the rules for interpretation for each literary form of Scripture. I highly recommend that you read the entire book, but we have enclosed the first chapter that is particularly relevant to this discussion as the reading for this unit.

In addition to the literary context we must consider the grammatical context the Scripture is in. That is, we need to understand the verses in the context of the sentence, paragraph, chapter and book that it is in.

It is so easy to distort the meaning of a verse by not taking into account its grammatical context. An example of this is Paul’s instructions “to avoid the appearance of evil” (1Thes 5:22) I have heard this verse quoted as reason why Christians should not go to movies or other places where they may be associated with evil practices. However wise this advice may be, this verse has nothing to do with that. This is the end of a paragraph with instructions to not quench the Holy Spirit but instead to allow freedom of expression and to embrace what is of God and to avoid that which is not.

Other rules that guide interpretation include the rule that the understanding of a scripture will not contradict what scripture says elsewhere and the rule that a writer will not contradict what he actually does. For example Paul would not mean that all women should be silent at all times in the church and at the same time instruct women what to wear when they pray or give a prophecy. Or Paul would not say women can not teach a man, anywhere at any time and then commend a woman for teaching a man.

Application/Hermeneutics

If we do our homework and conclude what the text meant to the original readers then we are in the right position to make proper application. This second step is called hermeneutics. It simply means bringing the original meaning of the text into present day application.

Rules of Hermeneutics

Here are some of the rules that guide bringing a principle or truth from the Biblical World into our context today.

First of all, the text cannot mean to us today what it never could have meant to its author. Let me explain. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul writes ‘when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away’. Some have concluded “the perfect” means the New Testament and they used this passage to say his earlier statements regarding seeking the gifts of the Spirit are no longer necessary, now that the New Testament has come. However, this passage could not have meant the New Testament because at this point neither Paul nor his readers had any idea there would ever be any such thing as a New Testament.

The second rule goes something like this; whenever we share similar life situations with the first century setting, then God’s word to them will directly apply to us today. For example, Paul clearly says in John 3:16 “for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have every lasting life.” This verse applies to us just as it would apply to those who first read John’s Gospel.

Another rule is when the writer is addressing a specific issue or situation in a specific context it is necessary to extract a general principle from this specific context and then make an appropriate application in our situation today.

We already saw an example of that above with the 1 Tim 2:8 passage. The specific application was men everywhere are to lift up holy hands without argument and dispute; the general principle is to pray with the right attitude, in right relationship with people, and the application today could be to say to a congregation who normally stands in corporate prayer “when you stand to pray, pray with clean hearts”.

Here is another example. Paul instructed believers in Corinth to not eat meat offered to idols if it offended others. (1 Corinthians 8) The application for them is clear. If you are offered meat that has been sacrificed to idols and if you are in a context where some have

Answer Box #6

Read 1 Corinthians 8.

- What is the point of this Chapter?
- What did Paul want the Corinthians to understand and do?
- How would you apply this in your life now?

the conviction eating it is wrong. DO NOT EAT IT.

These are only some of the rules of interpretation and application. Again I suggest if you want to explore more of these principles, you will find Dr. Fee’s book helpful. Our point has been simply to illustrate that **there are rules** and one must be intentional about following them as one seeks to understand and apply the Scripture.

Applying rules of interpretation and application to Paul’s Letters in the New Testament

I will never forget one of the first sermons I ever preached in church. It was a Wednesday night service. I was preaching from the Gospel of John, painting a picture of Jesus calling his disciples to come and follow him, when one of my male friends from our

youth group got up and walked out of the service! Later I asked him why he did that. And he said “the Bible says a woman is not permitted to teach a man, so I prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to tell me what this really means. And then I read it again. And the meaning was the same. So I figured I better get out of there while you were talking.”

Now I am grateful for the Holy Spirit. He has been given to believers to reveal God’s word to us. But sometimes simply closing our eyes and praying is not enough. In these next units we will explore Paul’s words regarding roles and behavior for women in the church and in marriage. And we will prayerfully apply these rules to understand and apply what he said.

First we will consider who Paul is and some basics about his historical and cultural setting. Then we will move on to address the key passages in Ephesians, Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

A note about the historical/cultural context of Paul

Paul was a strict Pharisee before he became a Christian. You might think that the Jewish scholars of Paul’s day would be familiar with the Genesis account and they would know that both men and women were made in the image of God and therefore they, of all people, would treat women equal to men and with respect. Unfortunately that was not the case.

In unit 2, we saw the Jewish Rabbis and Pharisees did not value women as highly as men and in fact, women were referred to as something one owns, like an animal. Women were not to be educated, especially in matters of religion. Wives had no legal rights to divorce their husband and could be divorced by the husband for the smallest of reasons. A related topic is the attitude of the Jewish Religious Leaders to non Jewish people or gentiles. They viewed gentiles as not acceptable to God and they would go out of their way to avoid contact with them.

As a former Pharisee, Paul’s view of women and gentiles was similar to what we find in the rabbinic writings of his day.

One of the most important things to understand about Paul is that he had a radical conversion which began when he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. His values, priorities and life direction completely changed. Most likely he was about 40, in line to become part of the Sanhedrin, the religious/political governing body for the Jews. Many scholars suggest Paul stood out as a leader of leaders among them.

Pharisees focused on that which set them apart from other people that which made them more righteous and thus more acceptable to God. Certainly in their mind they were more acceptable than the rest of Jewish men, all of Jewish women and of course the rest of mankind.

Paul’s encounter with Jesus, followed by his on going discipleship by the Holy Spirit, who dwelt within him, radically changed him. For example Paul not only changed his mind about the value of non Jewish people, he changed the way he related to them. Some of his closest friends and partners in faith were gentiles (e.g. Luke)

Paul experienced a similar conversion of heart toward women. In Unit 6, we will be looking at some of the women who worked alongside Paul. We will see he refers to some as co-workers with him in the service of Christ and he identifies them as valuable members of ministry teams, some of whom even lead those teams. You will see evidence that Paul was as passionate to see women freed from cultural/religious prejudice as he was about seeing the Gentiles freed.

A note about literary genre

Paul wrote epistles or letters. This is personal correspondence from him to a church. Every letter was written in response to specific circumstances the church was in or questions the church had. Paul had previous history with most of those he wrote to. He wrote his letter keeping that in mind.

For example Paul wrote 1 Timothy to Timothy and the Church in Ephesus. Paul had just left Ephesus. While he was there he was directly involved in identifying and throwing out influential false teachers. He departed Ephesus leaving Timothy in charge to continue to

deal with the false teaching problems. Paul writes this letter to both encourage Timothy and to let the Church know Timothy is functioning with Paul’s full authority. We must keep this context in mind when we study 1 Tim 2.

Because Paul’s letters are personal correspondence, we are aware of only part of the picture. In many ways reading them is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation. If you are in the room listening to a friend carry on a conversation on the telephone, you can only hear what the friend is saying, not what the other person is saying. You must guess what the other person’s questions or statements are by the tone of voice and what is being said in response.

A note about Interpretation and Application

As we address these key passages about women, we must seek to understand what is going on in the church to which he is writing. What are the issues? What is his point? What does Paul want them to understand and apply? We must work to hear Paul’s words first from their perspective. Once we understand that, then we can identify the point or general principle of the passage so that we can apply it today in our situation. In later units we will be taking a closer look at: women leaders and ministers recognized and commended by Paul as well as key passages such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15, 1 Corinthians 7, 11 and 14 and Ephesians 5.

Final Assignment:

Final Assignment

*Complete the reading below, then choose one from the three passages of Paul (listed below) that we will be studying in future units. Read the passage you chose all the way through. Now write a paragraph explaining **how you will decide what factors to consider** in order to interpret and apply this passage*

- 1 Timothy 2:11-15,
- 1 Corinthians, chapters 7, 11 and 14
- Ephesians 5

Note: This assignment is not asking that you do an interpretation, though you can use an interpretation to illustrate the factors important in deciding how to do the two things of (a) interpreting the text so you understand what it meant originally; and (b) applying it to today’s life and culture (what it means for us today).

Readings

How To Read The Bible For All It's Worth

Second Edition

A Guide to Understanding the Bible

By Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart

CHAPTER 1: Introduction: The Need to Interpret

Every so often we meet someone who says with great feeling, "You don't have to interpret the Bible; just read it and do what it says." Usually, such a remark reflects the layperson's protest against the "professional" scholar, pastor, teacher, or Sunday school teacher, who, by "interpreting," seems to be taking the Bible away from the common man or woman. It is their way of saying that the Bible is not an obscure book. "After all," it is argued, "any person with half a brain can read it and understand it. The problem with too many preachers and teachers is that they dig around so much they tend to muddy the waters. What was clear to us when we read it isn't so clear anymore."

There is a lot of truth in that protest. We agree that Christians should learn to read, believe, and obey the Bible. And we especially agree that the Bible should not be an obscure book if studied and read properly. In fact we are convinced that the single most serious problem people have with the Bible is not with a lack of understanding, but with the fact that they understand most things too well! The problem with such a text as "Do everything without complaining or arguing" (Phil. 2:14), for example, is not with understanding it, but with obeying it--putting it into practice.

We are also agreed that the preacher or teacher is all too often prone to dig first and look later, and thereby to cover up the plain meaning of the text, which often lies on the surface. Let it be said at the outset--and repeated throughout, that the aim of good interpretation is not uniqueness; one is not trying to discover what no one else has ever seen before.

Interpretation that aims at, or thrives on, uniqueness can usually be attributed to pride (an attempt to "out clever" the rest of the world), a false understanding of spirituality (wherein the Bible is full of deep truths waiting to be mined by the spiritually sensitive person with special insight), or vested interests (the need to support a theological bias, especially in dealing with texts that seem to go against that bias). Unique interpretations are usually wrong. This is not to say that the correct understanding of a text may not often *seem* unique to someone who hears it for the first time. But it is to say that uniqueness is *not* the aim of our task.

The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the "plain meaning of the text." And the most important ingredient one brings to that task is enlightened common sense. The test of good interpretation is that it makes good sense of the text. Correct interpretation, therefore, brings relief to the mind as well as a prick or prod to the heart.

But if the plain meaning is what interpretation is all about, then why interpret? Why not just read? Does not the plain meaning come simply from reading? In a sense, yes. But in a truer sense, such an argument is both naive and unrealistic because of two factors: the nature of the reader and the nature of Scripture.

The Reader as an Interpreter

The first reason one needs to learn *how* to interpret is that, whether one likes it or not, every reader is at the same time an interpreter. That is, most of us assume as we read that we also understand what we read. We also tend to think that *our understanding* is the

same thing as the Holy Spirit's or human author's *intent*. However, we invariably bring to the text all that we are, with all of our experiences, culture, and prior understandings of words and ideas. Sometimes what we bring to the text, unintentionally to be sure, leads us astray, or else causes us to read all kinds of foreign ideas into the text.

Thus, when a person in our culture hears the word "cross," centuries of Christian art and symbolism cause most people automatically to think of a Roman cross (†), although there is little likelihood that that was the shape of Jesus' cross, which was probably shaped like a "T." Most Protestants, and Catholics as well, when they read texts about the church at worship, automatically envision people sitting in a building with "pews" much like their own. When Paul says (in the KJV), "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:14), people in most English-speaking cultures are apt to think that "flesh" means the "body" and therefore that Paul is speaking of "bodily appetites."

But the word "flesh," as Paul uses it, seldom refers to the body--and in this text it almost certainly did not--but to a spiritual malady, a sickness of spiritual existence sometimes called "the sinful nature." Therefore, without intending to do so, the reader is interpreting as he or she reads, and unfortunately too often interprets incorrectly.

This leads us to note further that in any case the reader of an English Bible is already involved in interpretation. For translation is in itself a (necessary) form of interpretation. Your Bible, whatever translation you use, which is your *beginning* point, is in fact the *end result* of much scholarly work. Translators are regularly called upon to make choices regarding meanings and *their* choices are going to affect how you understand.

Good translators, therefore, take the problem of our language differences into consideration. But it is not an easy task. In Romans 13:14, for example, shall we translate "flesh" (as in KJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, etc.) because this is the word Paul used, and then leave it to an interpreter to tell us that "flesh" here does not mean "body"? Or shall we "help" the reader and translate "sinful nature" (as in the NIV, GNB, etc.) because this is what Paul's word really *means*? We will take up this matter in greater detail in the next chapter. For now it is sufficient to point out how the *fact* of translation in itself has already involved one in the task of interpretation.

The need to interpret is also to be found by noting what goes on around us all the time. A simple look at the contemporary church, for example, makes it abundantly clear that not all "plain meanings" are equally plain to all. It is of more than passing interest that most of those in today's church who argue that women should keep silent in church on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 at the same time deny the validity of speaking in tongues and prophecy, the very context in which the "silence" passage occurs. And those who affirm that women, as well as men, should pray and prophesy on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 often deny that they should necessarily do so with their heads covered. For some, the Bible "plainly teaches" believers' baptism by immersion; others believe they can make a biblical case for infant baptism. Both "eternal security" and the possibility of "losing one's salvation" are preached in the church, but never by the same person! Yet both are affirmed as the plain meaning of biblical texts. Even the two authors of this book have some disagreements as to what certain texts "plainly" mean. Yet all of us are reading the same Bible and we all are trying to be obedient to what the text "plainly" means.

Besides these recognizable differences among "Bible-believing Christians," there are also all kinds of strange things afloat. One can usually recognize the cults, for example, because they have an authority in addition to the Bible. But not all of them do; and in every case they bend the truth by the way they select texts from the Bible itself. Every imaginable heresy or practice, from the Arianism (denying Christ's deity) of the Jehovah's Witnesses and The Way, to baptizing for the dead among Mormons, to snake handling among Appalachian sects, claims to be "supported" by a text.

Even among more theologically orthodox people, however, many strange ideas manage to gain acceptance in various quarters. For example, one of the current rages among American Protestants, especially charismatics, is the so-called wealth and health gospel. The "good news" is that God's will for you is financial and material prosperity! One of

the advocates of this "gospel" begins his book by arguing for the "plain sense" of Scripture and claiming that he puts the Word of God first and foremost throughout his study. He says that it is not what we *think* it says but what it *actually* says that counts. The "plain meaning" is what he is after. But one begins to wonder what the "plain meaning" really is when financial prosperity is argued as the will of God from such a text as 3 John 2, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (KJV)--a text that in fact has nothing at all to do with financial prosperity. Another example takes the plain meaning of the story of the rich young man (Mark 10:17-22) as precisely the opposite of "what it actually says," and attributes the "interpretation" to the Holy Spirit. One may rightly question whether the plain meaning is being sought at all; perhaps the plain meaning is simply what such a writer wants the text to mean in order to support his pet ideas.

Given all this diversity, both within and without the church, and all the differences even among scholars, who supposedly know "the rules," it is no wonder that some argue for no interpretation, just reading. But as we have seen, that is a false option. The antidote to *bad* interpretation is not *no* interpretation, but *good* interpretation, based on common-sense guidelines.

The authors of this book labor under no illusions that by reading and following our guidelines everyone will finally agree on the "plain meaning," *our* meaning! What we do hope to achieve is to heighten the reader's sensitivity to specific problems inherent in each genre, to know why different options exist and how to make common-sense judgments, and especially to be able to discern between good and not-so-good interpretations--and to know what makes them one or the other.

The Nature of Scripture

A more significant reason for the need to interpret lies in the nature of Scripture itself. Historically the church has understood the nature of Scripture much the same as it has understood the person of Christ--the Bible is at the same time both human and divine. As Professor George Ladd once put it: "The Bible is the Word of God given in the words of [people] in history." It is this dual nature of the Bible that demands of us the task of interpretation.

Because the Bible is *God's Word*, it has *eternal relevance*; it speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture. Because it is God's Word, we must listen--and obey. But because God chose to speak his Word through *human words in history*, every book in the Bible also has *historical particularity*; each document is conditioned by the language, time, and culture in which it was originally written (and in some cases also by the oral history it had before it was written down). Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the "tension" that exists between its *eternal relevance* and its *historical particularity*.

There are some, of course, who believe that the Bible is merely a human book, and that it contains only words of people in history. For these people the task of interpreting is limited to historical inquiry. Their interest, as with Cicero or Milton, is with the religious ideas of the Jews, Jesus, or the early church. The task for them, therefore, is purely a historical one. What did these words mean to the people who wrote them? What did they think about God? How did they understand themselves?

On the other hand, there are those who think of the Bible only in terms of its eternal relevance. Because it is God's Word, they tend to think of it only as a collection of propositions to be believed and imperatives to be obeyed--although invariably there is a great deal of picking and choosing among the propositions and imperatives. There are, for example, Christians who, on the basis of Deuteronomy 22:5 ("A woman must not wear men's clothing," NIV), argue literally that a woman should not wear slacks or shorts. But the same people seldom take literally the other imperatives in that list, which include building a

parapet around the roof of one's house (v. 8), not planting two kinds of seeds in a vineyard (v. 9), and making tassels on the four corners of one's cloak (v. 12).

The Bible, however, is *not* a series of propositions and imperatives; it is not simply a collection of "Sayings from Chairman God," as though he looked down at us from heaven and said: "Hey you down there, learn these truths. Number 1, There is no God but One, and I am he. Number 2, I am the Creator of all things, including humankind"--and so on, all the way through proposition number 7,777 and imperative number 777.

These propositions of course are true; and they are found in the Bible (though not quite in that form). Indeed such a book might have made many things easier for us. But, fortunately, that is *not* how God chose to speak to us. Rather he chose to speak his eternal truths within the particular circumstances and events of human history. This also is what gives us hope. Precisely because God chose to speak in the context of real human history, we may take courage that these same words will speak again and again in our own "real" history, as they have throughout the history of the church.

The fact that the Bible has a human side is our encouragement; it is also our challenge, and is the reason that we need to interpret. Two things should be noted in this regard:

1. In speaking through real persons, in a variety of circumstances, over a 1500-year period, God's Word was expressed in the vocabulary and thought patterns of those persons and conditioned by the culture of those times and circumstances. That is to say, God's Word to us was first of all his Word to them. If they were going to hear it, it could only have come through events and in language *they* could have understood. Our problem is that we are so far removed from them in time, and sometimes in thought. This is the major reason one needs to learn to interpret the Bible. If God's Word about women wearing men's clothing or people having parapets around houses is to speak to us, we first need to know what it said to its original hearers--and why.

Thus the task of interpreting involves the student/reader at two levels. First, one has to hear the Word they heard; he or she must try to understand what was said to them *back then and there*. Second, one must learn to hear that same Word in the *here and now*. We will say more about these two tasks below.

2. One of the most important aspects of the human side of the Bible is that to communicate his Word to all human conditions, God chose to use almost every available kind of communication: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws of all kinds, poetry of all kinds, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses.

To interpret properly the "then and there" of the biblical texts, one must not only know some general rules that apply to all the words of the Bible, but one needs to learn the special rules that apply to each of these literary forms (genres). And the way God communicates his Word to us in the "here and now" will often differ from one form to another. For example, we need to know *how* a psalm, a form that was often addressed *to God*, functions as God's Word *to us*, and how psalms differ from the "laws," which were often addressed to people in cultural situations no longer in existence. *How* do such "laws" speak to us, and how do they differ from the moral "laws," which are always valid in all circumstances? Such are the questions the dual nature of the Bible forces upon us.

The First Task: Exegesis

The first task of the interpreter is called *exegesis*. Exegesis is the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning. This is basically a historical task. It is the attempt to hear the Word as the original recipients were to have heard it, to find out what was *the original intent of the words of the Bible*. This is the task that often calls for the help of the "expert," that person whose training has helped him or her to know well the

language and circumstances of the texts in their original setting. But one does *not* have to be an expert to do good exegesis.

In fact, everyone is an exegete of sorts. The only real question is whether you will be a good one. How many times, for example, have you heard or said, "What Jesus *meant* by that was . . ." or "Back in those days, they used to . . ."? Those are exegetical expressions. Most often they are employed to explain the differences between "them" and "us"--why we do not build parapets around our houses, for example, or to give a reason for our using a text in a new or different way--why hand-shaking has often taken the place of the "holy kiss." Even when such ideas are not articulated, they are in fact practiced all the time in a kind of common sense way.

The problem with much of this, however, is (1) that such exegesis is often too selective, and (2) that often the sources consulted are not written by true "experts," that is, they are secondary sources that also often use other secondary sources, rather than the primary sources. A few words about each of these must be given:

1. Although everyone employs exegesis at times, and although quite often such exegesis is well done, it nonetheless tends to be employed *only* when there is an obvious problem between the biblical texts and modern culture. Whereas it must indeed be employed for such texts, we insist that it is *the first step in reading EVERY text*. At first, this will not be easy to do, but learning to think exegetically will pay rich dividends in understanding and will make even the reading, not to mention the studying, of the Bible a much more exciting experience. But note well: Learning to think exegetically is not the *only* task; it is simply the *first* task.

The real problem with "selective" exegesis is that one will often read one's own, completely foreign, ideas into a text and thereby make God's Word something other than what God really said. For example, one of the authors of this book recently received a letter from a well-known evangelical, who argued that the author should not appear in a conference with another well-known person, whose orthodoxy was somewhat suspect. The biblical reason given for avoiding the conference was 1 Thessalonians 5:22: "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (KJV). But had our brother learned to read the Bible exegetically, he would not have used the text in that way. For that is Paul's final word in a *paragraph* to the Thessalonians regarding charismatic utterances in the community. "Don't treat prophecies with contempt," Paul says. "Rather, test everything; and hold fast to the good, but avoid every evil form." The "avoidance of evil" has to do with "prophecies," which, when tested, are found not to be of the Spirit. To make this text mean something God did not intend is to abuse the text, not use it. To avoid making such mistakes one needs to learn to think exegetically, that is, to begin back then and there, and to do so with every text.

2. As we will soon note, one does not *begin* by consulting the "experts." But when it is necessary to do so, one should try to use the better sources. For example, in Mark 10:23 (Matt. 19:23; Luke 18:24), at the conclusion of the story of the rich young man, Jesus says, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God." He then adds: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom." It is often said that there was a gate in Jerusalem known as the "Needle's Eye," which camels could go through only by kneeling, and with great difficulty. The point of this "interpretation" is that a camel could in fact go through the "Needle's Eye." The trouble with this "exegesis," however, is that it is simply not true. There never was such a gate in Jerusalem at any time in its history. The earliest known "evidence" for that idea is found in the eleventh century (!), in a commentary by a Greek churchman named Theophylact, who had the same difficulty with the text that we do. After all, it is *impossible* for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, and that was precisely Jesus' point. It is impossible for one who trusts in riches to enter the kingdom. It takes a miracle for a rich person to get saved, which is quite the point of what follows: "All things are possible with God."

Learning to Do Exegesis

How, then, do we learn to do good exegesis, and at the same time avoid the pitfalls along the way? The first part of most of the chapters in this book will explain how one goes about this task for each of the genres in particular. Here we simply want to overview what is involved in the exegesis of any text.

At its highest level, of course, exegesis requires knowledge of many things we do not necessarily expect the readers of this book to know: the biblical languages; the Jewish, Semitic, and Hellenistic backgrounds; how to determine the original text when the manuscripts have variant readings; the use of all kinds of primary sources and tools. But you can learn to do good exegesis even if you do not have access to all of these skills and tools. To do so, however, you must learn first what you can do with your own skills, and second you must learn to use the work of others.

The key to good exegesis, and therefore to a more intelligent reading of the Bible, is *to learn to read the text carefully and to ask the right questions of the text*. One of the best things one could do in this regard would be to read Mortimer J. Adler’s *How to Read a Book* (1940, rev. ed. with Charles Van Doren, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972). Our experience over many years in college and seminary teaching is that many people simply do not know how to read well. To read or study the Bible intelligently demands careful reading, and that includes learning to ask the right questions of the text.

There are two basic kinds of questions one should ask of every biblical passage: those that relate to *context* and those that relate to *content*. The questions of context are also of two kinds: *historical* and *literary*. Let us briefly note each of these.

The Historical Context

The historical context, which will differ from book to book, has to do with several things: the *time* and *culture* of the author and his readers, that is, the geographical, topographical, and political factors that are relevant to the author's setting; and the *occasion* of the book, letter, psalm, prophetic oracle, or other genre. All such matters are especially important for understanding.

It simply makes a difference in understanding to know the personal background of Amos, Hosea, or Isaiah, or that Haggai prophesied *after* the exile, or to know the messianic expectations of Israel when John the Baptist and Jesus appeared on the scene, or to understand the differences between the cities of Corinth and Philippi and how these affect the churches in each. One's reading of Jesus' parables is greatly enhanced by knowing something about the customs of Jesus' day. Surely it makes a difference in understanding to know that the "penny" (*KJV*), or denarius, offered to the workers in Matthew 20:1-16 was the equivalent of a full day's wage. Even matters of topography are important. One who was raised in the American West--or East for that matter--must be careful not to think of "the mountains that surround Jerusalem" (Ps. 125:2) in terms of his or her own experience of mountains!

To answer most of these kinds of questions, one will need some outside help. A good Bible dictionary, such as the four-volume *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. G. W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) or the five-volume *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (ed. Merrill C. Tenney, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) or the one-volume *New Bible Dictionary* (ed. J. D. Douglas, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), will generally supply the need here. If one wishes to pursue a matter further, the bibliographies at the end of each article will be a good place to start.

The more important question of historical context, however, has to do with the *occasion* and *purpose* of each biblical book and/or of its various parts. Here one wants to have an idea of what was going on in Israel or the church that called forth such a document, or what the situation of the author was that caused him to write. Again, this will vary from book to book, and it is much less crucial for Proverbs, for example, than for 1 Corinthians.

The answer to this question is usually to be found--when it can be found--within the book itself. But you need to learn to read with your eyes open for such matters. If you want to corroborate your own findings on these questions, you might consult your Bible dictionary again, or the introduction to a good commentary on the book, or look at *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible* (ed. David Alexander and Pat Alexander, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973). But make your own observations first!

The Literary Context

This is what most people mean when they talk about reading something in its context. Indeed this is *the* crucial task in exegesis, and fortunately it is something one can do well without necessarily having to consult the "experts." Essentially *literary context* means that words only have meaning in sentences, and for the most part biblical sentences only have meaning in relation to preceding and succeeding sentences.

The most important contextual question you will ever ask, and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph is, "What's the point?" We must try to trace the author's train of thought. What is the author saying and why does he or she say it right here? Having made that point, what is he or she saying next, and why?

This question will vary from genre to genre, but it is *always* the crucial question. The goal of exegesis, you remember, is to find out what the original author intended. To do this task well, it is imperative that one use a translation that recognizes poetry end paragraphs. One of the major causes of inadequate exegesis by readers of the King James Version, and to a lesser degree of the New American Standard, is that every verse has been printed as a paragraph. Such an arrangement tends to obscure the author's own logic. Above all else, therefore, one must learn to recognize units of thought, whether they be paragraphs (for prose) or lines and sections (for poetry). And, with the aid of an adequate translation, this is something the reader can do.

The Questions of Content

The second major category of questions one asks of any text has to do with the author's actual content. "Content" has to do with the meanings of words, the grammatical relationships in sentences, and the choice of the original text where the manuscripts have variant readings. It also includes a number of the items mentioned above under "historical context," for example, the meaning of denarius, or a Sabbath day's journey, or "high places," etc.

For the most part, these are the questions of meaning that one ordinarily asks of the biblical text. When Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:16, "Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer" (NASB), one should want to know, Who is "according to the flesh," Christ or the one knowing him? It makes a considerable difference in meaning to learn that "we" know Christ no longer "from a worldly point of view" is what Paul intends, not that we know Christ no longer "in His earthly life."

To answer these kinds of questions one will ordinarily need to seek outside help. Again, the quality of one's answers to such questions will usually depend on the quality of the sources one uses. This is the place where you will finally want to consult a good exegetical commentary. But please note that consulting a commentary, as essential as that will be at times, is the *last* thing one does.

The Tools

For the most part, then, you can do good exegesis with a minimum amount of outside help, provided that that help is of the highest quality. We have mentioned four such tools: a

good Bible dictionary, a good Bible handbook, a good translation, and good commentaries. There are other kinds of tools, of course, especially for topical or thematic kinds of study. But for reading or studying the Bible book by book, these are the essential ones.

Because a good translation (or better, several good translations) is the absolutely basic tool for one who does not know the original languages, the next chapter is devoted to this matter. Learning to choose a good commentary is also important, but because that is the last thing one does, an appendix on commentaries concludes the book.

The Second Task: Hermeneutics

Although the word "hermeneutics" ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis, it is also used in the narrower sense of seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts. In this book we will use it exclusively in this way, to ask the questions about the Bible's meaning in the "here and now."

It is this matter of the here and now, after all, that brings us to the Bible in the first place. So why not start here? Why worry about exegesis? Surely the same Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible can equally inspire one's reading of it. In a sense this is true, and we do not by this book intend to take from anyone the joy of devotional reading of the Bible and the sense of direct communication involved in such reading. But devotional reading is not the only kind one should do. One must also read for learning and understanding. In short, one must also learn to study the Bible, which in turn must inform one's devotional reading. And that brings us to our insistence that proper "hermeneutics" begins with solid "exegesis."

The reason one must *not begin* with the here and now is that *the only proper control for hermeneutics is to be found in the original intent of the biblical text*. As noted earlier in this chapter, this is the "plain meaning" one is after. Otherwise biblical texts can be made to mean whatever they mean to any given reader. But such hermeneutics becomes pure subjectivity, and who then is to say that one person's interpretation is right, and another's is wrong. Anything goes.

In contrast to such subjectivity, we insist that the original meaning of the text--as much as it is in our power to discern it--is the objective point of control. We are convinced that the Mormons' baptizing for the dead on the basis of 1 Corinthians 15:29, or the Jehovah's Witnesses' rejection of the deity of Christ, or the snake handlers' use of Mark 16:18, or the "prosperity evangelists" advocating the American dream as a Christian right on the basis of 3 John 2 are all improper interpretation. In each case the error is their hermeneutics, precisely because their hermeneutics is not controlled by good exegesis. They have started with the here and now and have read into the texts meanings that were not originally there. And what is to keep one from killing one's daughter because of a foolish vow, as did Jephthah (Judg. 11:29-40), or to argue, as one preacher is reported to have done, that women should never wear their hair up in a top knot ("bun") because the Bible says "topknot go down" ("Let him who is on the housetop not go down," Mark 13:15)?

It will be argued, of course, that common sense will keep one from such foolishness. Unfortunately common sense is not so common. We want to know what the Bible means *for us*--legitimately so. But we cannot make it mean anything that pleases us, and then give the Holy Spirit "credit" for it. The Holy Spirit cannot be called in to contradict himself, and he is the one who inspired the original intent. Therefore, his help for us will be in the discovering of that original intent, and in guiding us as we try faithfully to apply that meaning to our own situations.

The questions of hermeneutics are not at all easy, which is probably why so few books are written on this aspect of our subject. Nor will all agree on how one goes about this task. But this is the crucial area, and believers need to learn to talk to one another about these questions--and to listen. On this one thing, however, there must surely be agreement. *A text cannot mean what it never meant*. Or to put that in a positive way, the true meaning of the biblical text for us is what God originally intended it to mean when it was first spoken.

This is the starting point. How we work it out from that point is what this book is basically all about.

Someone will surely ask, "But is it not possible for a text to have an additional (or fuller, or deeper) meaning, beyond its original intent? After all, this happens in the New Testament itself in the way it sometimes uses the Old Testament." In the case of prophecy, we would not close the door to such a possibility, and would argue that, with careful controls, a second, or fuller, meaning is possible. But how does one justify it at other points? Our problem is a simple one. Who speaks for God? Roman Catholicism has less of a problem here; the magisterium, the authority vested in the official teaching of the church, determines for all the fuller sense of the text. Protestants, however, have no magisterium, and we should be properly concerned whenever anyone says he or she has God's deeper meaning to a text--especially so, if the text never meant what it is now made to mean. Of such things are all the cults born, and innumerable lesser heresies.

It is difficult to give rules for hermeneutics. What we offer throughout the following chapters, therefore, are guidelines. You may not agree with our guidelines. We do hope that your disagreements will be with Christian charity, and perhaps our guidelines will serve to stimulate your own thinking on these matters.

Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 6

First Timothy

Development Associates International

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 6: First Timothy

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Readings:

Why Not Women?

By Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton
Chapter 16: “Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach”
Chapter 17: “Paul’s Gracious Solution”

Further Readings:

Textbook: *God’s Women Then and Now* By Deborah M. Gill and Barbara Cavaness,
Chapter 10

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Indicate the social implications created by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on women and gentiles who become Christians.
- Name and describe specific women who worked alongside Paul in leadership in church as well as on the mission field.
- State the relevance of the historical, cultural and literary context to understanding of 1 Tim 2:11-15 and give several of the alternative interpretations of this difficult text.

Introduction

In this unit we will see that Paul respected women and recognized them along side men as a fully functioning part of the Body of Christ. We will get acquainted with some of the women that Paul served along side of both in church and on the mission field. We will see that he not only encouraged women to minister to both men and women, Paul received from them, himself. And finally, we will consider 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

Case Study:

When Rebecca arrived for her meeting with Dr. Aziz on Thursday evening she seemed so distracted that Dr. Aziz asked her what the problem was. “Oh, I am so sorry, said Rebecca sincerely, “I guess I’m still thinking so much about what happened at the hospital today that I’m having trouble focusing.”

“Well, tell me about it dear,” said Dr. Aziz, “if it is troubling you so much it must be something important enough to discuss.”

Smiling at his kindness, Rebecca began to recount the events of the day. “There is a teaching unit associated with our hospital and one of the new professors there has been teaching a complex surgical procedure to the interns for the last month, but today he was fired. It just seems very unfair,” Rebecca said with passion, “he only made one real mistake and I’m sure it wasn’t intentional!”

“You see, part of the problem is that he has never actually done this surgery himself,” began Rebecca, “but he’s been reading about it on the internet and felt that he understood it quite well. He felt sure that it would be a good improvement to the way we normally do this procedure and because of this, he began teaching this new method to the third year students. Its horrible, but when one of the students tried it out this last week his patient died as a result.” Rebecca said, her eyes filling with tears thinking of the tragedy all around. “That’s why he was fired. He was held responsible for this intern’s actions. Oh course it is terrible that the patient died, but isn’t it unfair to fire him just because he made this one mistake Dr. Aziz? His career will basically be ruined over this.”

“Well child,” Dr. Aziz began and again his fatherly attitude seemed so reassuring, “this is indeed a serious thing that has happened. When you take responsibility to teach others you must be doubly careful about what you teach because you are not only impacting those you are teaching, but you are impacting all those they will come in contact with too. In fact it reminds me of what we were supposed to be talking about tonight from I Timothy. Maybe while we study I Timothy, your friend’s situation will seem clearer.”

Answer Box # 1

Think about the incident that Rebecca just shared. What mistakes did this medical professor make? List as many as you can think of.

Remember this situation later as we look at the specifics of I Timothy 2, but for now, let us begin by looking at the New Testament in general as it relates to women and ministry.

Lecturette:

The New Testament in general as it relates to women and ministry

In Unit 4, we saw that Jesus related to women radically different than the Jewish culture of the day. He treated them with dignity and respect. But what about His disciples; how did they relate to women? The Gospel stories show their surprise with Jesus as he interacted with the Samaritan woman and others. Did they eventually change their attitudes toward women? Yes they did but not without help!

Just before the cross, Jesus told the disciples it was for their good that he was leaving them. He promised he would send the Holy Spirit, the **helper**. (John 14) The Holy Spirit had only been **with** them, but Jesus promised he would send the Holy Spirit to dwell **in** them. (John 7) Up to this point, no one could conceive that even Jewish men could become the dwelling place of God, never mind Jewish women and Gentiles.

However, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Both Jewish men **and Jewish women** received Him. (The first believers at Pentecost were Jewish men and women or Jewish converts) In his explanation, Peter refers to the Prophet Joel who said "God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh both men and women". (Acts 2:17-18). A few years later, **even Gentiles** freely received the Holy Spirit in response to their faith in Jesus. (Acts 10-11) This created a social-cultural revolution!

Answer Box # 2

Identify several racial, social or gender prejudices in your culture. Are these same prejudices evident in the church? Why or why not? What difference could the church make in discipling your nation in areas racial, social or gender prejudice?

Born by the Spirit, the first fellowships of believers functioned in ways that broke all kinds of social norms. Men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slave and free interacted freely with one another in public settings. For example at that time, your social value or class determined where and with whom you ate. You rarely would see women eating with men even in an extended household, Jews eating with Gentiles or masters eating with slaves. So when the church celebrated the "Lord's Supper" with a meal as well as the bread and wine, it radically broke the social rules!

Consider this: People who spent their whole lives trying to avoid one another, possibly even hating each other now find themselves **together** in a new family context. What to eat? What to wear? Where to be buried? Who to marry? Where to live? These are just a few of the basic questions they faced.

Models for how **to live, relate and work in society** were also changing as Christians cooperated with the Spirit. The values that marked the relationships in the Trinity were to become the values of the **church and society**. Let me say it another way. The outpouring of the Spirit had an effect on relationships both in the church **and** in all society. People were changing their ways. Like the way they did business, the way they educated children, the way they treated foreigners, the way they governed, and the way they treated the poor and the vulnerable. These kinds of changes did not come easy.

I experienced a taste of what this might have been like in one of our Discipleship Training Schools (DTS) in Amsterdam in the late 80s. The DTS program is designed so that all the staff and students live and learn together in a community setting for 24 weeks. For 12

weeks the group is engaged in 50 hours of intentional learning activity which is then followed by 12 week outreach. 15 hours of that intentional activity is used to do practical work.

In this particular DTS we had two students from South Africa, one from a white community and one from a black community. In South Africa at that time roles were clearly defined based on color. Black people work in certain jobs. White people work in certain jobs. Overnight these students left their communities and culture in South Africa and entered the community and culture of our Disciple Training School. The student from the black community was given a receptionist job. The student from the white community was put on the team that cleaned the toilets. This activity alone had a radical impact on both of the South African students. However, it took time and an intentional process for this change to impact their hearts as well as their actions.

In another DTS in Greece, we had several students from Romania, both men and women. One of the work assignments involves kitchen duties. Planning, buying, preparing the food and cleaning up the dishes after the meal. The Romanian men had some of these responsibilities. BUT ROMANIAN MEN DO NOT DO KITCHEN WORK. THAT IS FOR WOMEN! They said. And when I was not watching the situation closely the Romanian women would sneak into the kitchen and take over the men's jobs. This meant the women were doing two work assignments and the men had none. Time and time again I would come alongside them and ask them why they thought it was right for women to work so hard to serve the men and the men did nothing. And all they could say is that this is the way it is in our culture. Change at a heart level comes slowly.

Answer Box # 3

Talk about these examples along with similar experiences of your own and explain why change comes slowly in these kinds of situations.

One last example: While in Graduate School I team taught a Sunday School Class in a local church with a male friend and fellow student. We were teaching the Old Testament to 15 year old boys and girls. My friend came from a strong Christian family whose parents as well as his aunts and uncles were significant Christian leaders, although the women either served to support their husbands or they were leaders of only women. One day he asked to me join him for a cup of coffee. I could tell by the way he was acting that he had something to say to me and that it must be serious. I could not even imagine what the issue was. As always he treated me with respect. He pulled out my chair for me to sit. And he brought me a cup of coffee. And then he said something like this to me "I can not continue to team teach with you. And I am very sorry about that. You see my family believes that a man must not be taught Scripture by a woman. And when you are teaching in class and I am listening, I am being taught by you. And I feel guilty."

He then went on to say "you are a better teacher than me and I think you need to continue to teach the class because the kids will benefit the most from you." Can you imagine what was going through my head? Was now the time to debate the issue? He was from a family who laid the foundations to modern Evangelicalism. Since he was baby he was taught what a godly Christian man was to do and not do. Could change come over a cup of coffee in a conversation with me, a relatively new friend? We might have started a discussion but change would not have come by the next time we had to teach those kids. So I said. "The boys in the class need a role model more than then need to hear teaching content. So you do the teaching. I will help the group process your teaching." And so it was.

Likewise, the early church needed time and discipleship before relationships and roles were aligned to Biblical standards. Paul and the other Biblical writers consistently

emphasized throughout their writings that **every member** of the church was to be viewed as one in which God, through the Holy Spirit, dwelt regardless of gender, ethnicity or class. Therefore each person was to be valued and treated with dignity. They also emphasized that the Holy Spirit gives gifts to each without partiality. (Romans 12 – 14, 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4:4-16). And that their commission **together** was to disciple the nations.

Paul understood and never wavered from the fact that just as God commissioned both Adam and Eve to multiply and take dominion so Jesus commissioned **the whole church**, not just those from a Jewish background, or the men or the adults

As you might know these changes did not always come without resistance, even from within the church. In addition people had a lot to learn so that they could make appropriate contributions in worship and ministry. The times the church gathered for worship and instruction in the Word were important times to build or reinforce this new social order. Paul’s Epistles are filled with instructions for how they were to relate to one another. He repeatedly reminded them that in Christ “*you are **all children of God through faith. For all of you who were baptized in Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.***” Gal 3:26-28

Answer Box # 4

Stop now and consider your own church. Consider the variety of peoples in the fellowship of believers where you belong. Identify who has opportunity to serve with their gifts both in and through the church? What qualifies someone to lead or make a contribution in the ministry of the church? Is gender, age, race or social standing part of the qualifications? Explain why?

Paul pleads with the Church “do not grieve the Spirit of God” Eph 4:30. Few things grieve the Spirit of God more than to dishonor or ignore a sister or brother in the Lord, or to deny them a place of ministry as they seek to obey Him.

Paul learned the hard way that Jesus was directly affected by the way he treated Christians. (Acts 9) Christians of all people must transcend cultural, racial and gender prejudice of any kind. When we gather as the people of God we are to worship God and relate to one another according to God’s ways. This requires a radical change in heart attitudes. No wonder the early church was in need of so much instruction and correction as they endeavored to live according to this God given pattern. Paul puts a priority on this in his writings. He knows that **only as the church becomes who she is suppose to be will she be able to cooperate with God to do all she has been commissioned to do among the nations.**

How do people change their ways in such fundamental matters as the basic roles of men and women in family and in society, or appropriate behavior in public? Well for one thing they need role models. Paul understood this. One of his discipling strategies was to minister in cities with a team made up of men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile. Paul and his small team lived among new Christians for a period of time to model for them how to live, relate, worship and do ministry.

Paul was not a lone male dominant independent Christian leader/missionary. He was a team player and made room in his own team for others, including women, to serve Christ along side him. Together they modeled what Christian fellowship was to look like wherever they served. How do you think it impacted people to see Paul learning from Priscilla as she taught from the Old Testament or as he worked side by side with Syntyche and Euodia in advancing the Gospel? Models speak louder than words.

Answer Box # 5

Consider the effectiveness of learning through models. Identify some fundamental ways you live and relate that were significantly influenced by a role model. Do you think a book or sermon without the model would have had the same effect? Why or why not?

Given the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all who believed, it should be no surprise that leaders emerge in the church, who not only were Jewish men, like Peter and John but also Gentiles like Stephen, Phillip and Luke **and** women like those we meet below. Some of these women are leaders, teachers, evangelists and apostles, who either worked alongside Paul in Ephesus or Corinth or were endorsed by him. Consider the fact that his team modeled to these churches the full inclusion of women into leadership and ministry. This is part of the historical context in which we must consider his words about women in the letters that he writes to these very churches.

So lets take a closer look at who these women are and then we will consider Paul's words to Timothy in 1Timothy 2:11-15

Specific female leaders and ministers identified by Paul

Priscilla: Priscilla (Prisca) and her husband, Aquila, were very good friends of Paul's. They worked at the same trade, were exiled from Rome and helped Paul plant the church in Corinth and Ephesus. There is certainly no doubt they were instrumental in Paul's ministry. Paul speaks of them in the most glowing terms as colleagues and faithful co-workers. Not just to Aquila but to both. As a matter of fact it is most unusual that most of the time when Paul mentions them, he refers to Priscilla first. This is **not** normal, in the Greek and Roman culture, the man's name always came first. Always!

The earliest of Christian Scholars have noted the significance of Priscilla's name preceding her husbands. John Chrysostom, one of the early church fathers who lived in the fourth century AD says 'why(has) Paul .. placed Priscilla before her husband. For (Paul) did not say, "Greet Aquila and Priscilla," but "Priscilla and Aquila. He does not do this without reason, but he seems to me to acknowledge a greater godliness for her than for her husband. What I say is not guesswork, because it is possible to learn this from the Book of Acts. Priscilla took Apollos, an eloquent man and powerful in the scriptures, but knowing only John's baptism, she instructed him in the way of the Lord and made him a teacher brought to completion.' It is clear that the great Apollos had a woman instructor. Even Tertullian, another early church father, who certainly did not promote women has said 'by the holy Prisca the Gospel is preached.'"

Chloe: Chloe is with the church in Corinth. Delegates from Chloe's household have informed Paul of some issues of concern in the Corinthian church. The actual verse says '...some from Chloe's have informed' (1 Corinthians 1:11) Now, as you see the word household is not actually in the Greek. Paul uses what is called an ellipsis which is grammatical devise where the writer omits some words that can be understood by the context. In English and most other languages, we say, I am going to church, so is Mary. The ellipsis would ask the hearer/reader to understand that Mary was going to church also. But if you just read, so is Mary, by itself it would make no sense. With the context of the preceding phrase, the statement is quite clear.

Paul uses the exact same wording in Romans 16, when he says ‘greet those of Narcissus, greet those of Aristobulus. The actual words **of the household** are understood. The way Paul refers to Narcissus and Aristobulus are commonly taken to mean they lead the house church. That is, we understand Paul was greeting not just the leaders but their church as well.

Since Paul refers to Chloe in a similar way, it is reasonable to conclude he is implying the delegation has come from Chloe’s household; that is the delegates are from the church that she leads.

Phoebe: Phoebe was associated with the church in Cenchrea, a smaller town just outside of Corinth. While we can not be sure exactly her standing in the church, she most certainly was held in very high esteem by Paul.

In Rom 16:1 Paul says “I commend to you Phoebe, our sister who is a **diakonos** of the church.” Diakonos has been translated as servant, deacon and sometimes minister. It is exactly the same word Paul uses to describe any of his male co-workers. When this Greek word is used in relation to men, today’s translators use the English word “minister” or “leader”, however, in reference to Phoebe they use the word “servant” or in some versions the transliteration deaconess (note they make it feminine). The Greek is not a feminine form.

In some churches they recognize female leaders and appoint them to serve in a limited capacity as a deaconess. Therefore it might be easy for some today to embrace Phoebe as a deaconess because they read into her role the functions of a modern day deaconess. However, it is important to note there is simply no distinction of the role of minister and deacon in the New Testament (and no feminine form of deaconess).

Paul goes on to say Phoebe has been the **prostatis** to many, including himself. This word, prostatis, is only used once in the New Testament. It can mean helper, but only in a secondary sense. Its primary meaning is more a servant-leader; a leader who champions the cause of others rather than pursuing self interests.

Thus what we do know about Phoebe is she was a minister of the church in Cenchrea, who was a servant leader to many, including Paul.

Junia: In Romans 16: 7 Paul says “greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles and they were in Christ before I was.

Andronicus and Junia are apostles. The name Junia is clearly a woman’s name. Research shows Junia is both a feminine form of a name and it was clearly not used for men in Paul’s day.

Today this is a dilemma for translators who do not believe women can exercise leadership in the church. Of seven modern translations in English, three stay true to the original Greek and translate it as Junia but four add an “s” to her name: Junias

Others: Euodia, Syntyche, Mary, Persis, Tryphena and Tryphosa were all women that Paul referred to as either his coworkers or fellow laborers. Using the same words exactly that he used for any male.

Answer Box # 6

You have just read or heard about several women that the scriptures tell us Paul recognized as leaders in the church. From what you have just read, comment on what you think the church learned from the model of Paul working alongside these women and endorsing their leadership and ministry.

Now we will turn our attention to 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Do you remember my male friend who walked out when I was preaching on a Wednesday night? It was these verses in 1 Timothy that were so confusing to him. It seemed so clear to him Paul simply meant what he said. And for him Paul prohibited women from teaching or having authority over men. I wish my friend had known about Priscilla or Phoebe or Junia. If he did he would have at least had to stop and ask how could Paul commend female leaders in one letter and say women are not to teach or lead in another. As we consider this passage let us keep in mind how Paul himself relates to and works with women. Let’s read the passage and make some initial observations.

Answer Box # 7

Read 1 Tim 2:11-15. Given what we just considered about specific female leaders around Paul, what questions come to mind when you read what Paul says here? (Notice the singular form for woman) Write down at least four questions.

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.

12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

15 But women will be saved through childbearing-if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety

Well one thing to notice is Paul gets very specific in verse 11 and says a **woman** (singular). This particularly stands out because a few verses earlier he addresses **women** in general regarding dress and a few verses latter he speaks of **women** being saved. So it is odd he uses the singular form in verse 11, unless of course he has one specific woman in mind.

Some other observations and questions would include:

- Who is Paul writing to? What is happening there? Why is he writing? What is the context of 1 Tim 2:11-15? As always we need to understand the historical/cultural context.
- Notice Paul says he wants a woman to learn? What is the content and context of that learning to be? Often we focus on what Paul says he does not want the woman to do and we miss this important aspect of his instructions.
- Notice Paul identifies a specific attitude in how he wants this woman to learn verse 11 “in full submission”? Is it possible he is addressing a specific attitude of someone that needs correcting in the similar way he corrected the attitude of men in verse 8 where he says I want men to pray without anger or disputing?
- Notice he sounds like he is making a decision about something specific I am not permitting a woman...” in verse 12, like he has been mulling over his options and now has come to a conclusion.
- The Greek word for “have authority over” is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used. There are other Greek words commonly used to denote the

authority of a leader. If Paul wanted to say I do not permit a woman to lead a man he would have said that. The word he chose to use says something like I do not want a woman to usurp the authority of a man....” again sounding like Paul is speaking to a specific situation in which he is reinforcing the authority of a leader. (Possibly Timothy?)

- Why refer to Genesis passage? Is he rooting his decision in a principle from Genesis that is binding for all women at all time or is there another reason?
- What does “childbearing” have to do with a women’s salvation?

We will begin to address some of these questions as we continue in this unit. However, our reading assignments will help you explore them further. Please be sure to continue to ask your own questions of the text as you consider the input here and in the reading material.

Historical and Cultural Context

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who presently had pastoral responsibility for the church at Ephesus. Key founders of the Church were Paul, Priscilla and Aquila. In fact Priscilla and Aquila had a primary role in planting this church. Paul left this couple in Ephesus to pastor/teach the church while he traveled on to Jerusalem. (Acts 18:18-28) By then, Paul knew Priscilla and Aquila well. He lived in their home in Corinth for 18 months. He worked along side them in the tent making business. The fact that Paul left them in Ephesus shows his endorsement of their teaching ministry.

We saw in Unit 5 on “How to read the Bible”, it is not possible for one passage of Scripture to mean something that completely contradicts the meaning of other passages of Scripture nor is it possible for a writer to say something that contradicts what he actually does.

If 1 Tim 2:12 really meant that no women anywhere at any time throughout history should teach men, than how is it that Paul embraced the ministry of Priscilla and endorsed her to the Ephesians, the very church he is now addressing through 1 Timothy? Well from our perspective he can not mean that. In fact we believe he is addressing a specific situation in Ephesus at this time and he may even be addressing a specific woman. Paul enforced desperate measures to gain control of the quickly spreading false teaching in this church. Let’s read 1 Timothy to discover more about the situation.

Answer Box # 8

Read through 1 Timothy in one sitting keeping these questions in mind: Why does Paul write this letter? What is the problem Paul is addressing? What do you think the answers could be to these two questions based on your reading?

From a quick reading of this letter it is clear there are false teachers and false teaching in Ephesus. Paul wants Timothy to (1) stop the false teachers (2) to protect those who are vulnerable to false teachings and (3) to ensure teachers handle the Scriptures properly and teach the truth.

Other helpful information gleaned from 1 & 2 Timothy and Acts

- Paul had just left Ephesus. While there, Paul excommunicated two of the false teachers (Hymenaeus and Alexander) 1 Tim 1:20.

- Paul asked Timothy to identify the other false teachers and bring order to the church (1 Tim 1:3; 5:19).
- False teachers were among the “elders” (Acts 20:28-29).
- The false teachers were primarily men (1 Tim 1:20, 2 Tim 2:17) but not exclusively.
- Paul uses a gender inclusive term for them which implies the false teachers included at least one women (1 Tim 1:3, 5:13).
- False teachers target the young widows who were unmarried and vulnerable. (1Tim 5:11-15; 2 Tim 3:6-9).
- Young widows pass on the teaching to others by going from house to house (1Tim 5:13 2 Tim 3:6-7).
- Women, particularly widows, were vulnerable to the false teachers so Paul suggests ways to engage them so that they would not be so isolated or vulnerable. (1 Tim 5).
- Notice Paul switches from the plural form of “women” verse 9 to the singular form “woman” verse 11 back to the plural “women” verse 15.

Answer Box # 9

Given what you know about the situation in Ephesus

*What might the significance be that Paul says he does not permit a woman to **teach but to learn**?*

What similarities might there be between women in this church with Eve, other than they are all female?

There is no doubt Paul has had to implement extreme measures to root out the false teachers in Ephesus. He has already made a personal trip there. He has identified the ring leaders and kicked them out of the fellowship. He then writes this letter to strongly endorse Timothy in his efforts to continue to root out the false teachers. He reminds Timothy not to be intimidated by them. Part of Timothy’s responsibility is to lead a process to evaluate the elders and to be sure that any charges that come against an elder are made by two or three witnesses. 5:19. Paul also instructs Timothy to rebuke those who fall short publicly 5:20.

One of the greatest challenges of false teaching is not happening in their corporate times together where it would be easy to identify and stop it. Instead it is like an underground movement. The false teachers have targeted women in their homes, mostly widows. They go house to house in search of those who are vulnerable. (2 Tim 3:6-7) Then the women themselves continue to pass on the teaching with their neighbors.

How does a Pastor stop an underground movement! How does he gain control of a process that is completely out of control? This is Paul and Timothy’s dilemma.

Given this context it is reasonable to think at least one of the false teachers is a woman. That could explain why he switches from plural (women) to singular (woman) in verse 11. He is actually talking about a specific woman. Apparently after being deceived by male false teachers, she is now passing on their false teaching.

David Hamilton (see the readings at the end of this unit) suggests that Paul, out of compassion, does not identify her by name like he did the male leaders just a few verses before, in an attempt to give her a chance to change. Perhaps she has been the victim of

false teachers herself. Notice he starts his commands by saying she is to **learn** and not to teach. In other words, her false doctrine is to be corrected.

Paul is not addressing a problem of gender but of education. And both men and women are falling short of this in Ephesus. Paul’s solution is for Timothy to teach those who are teachable! Do not let any usurp his authority, even this woman.

Are women vulnerable to deception more than men?

Now let’s consider why Paul might refer back to Eve in Genesis. Read the verses again.

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.

Let’s consider again the context of this verse in Genesis. Adam was created first. Before God created Eve, God acquainted Adam with the Garden and with the rules, including the instructions “Do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”. Then Eve was created. In her conversation with the snake we see Eve knows about the rule regarding the tree of good and evil but she does not say the rule accurately. Some important questions in the study of this Genesis account are “who tells Eve about the rule? Does God tell her directly? (There is no record of God telling her.) Does Adam tell her? And if so does he do it correctly but she distorts it? Or does Adam tell her an incorrect version of it?”

Another question is why does the serpent approach Eve? Does he think she is more vulnerable to deception? And what would make her vulnerable: her gender? No. Eve was vulnerable to the serpent’s temptations but not because she was a woman. What made her vulnerable was the fact she had second hand knowledge of the rules. God told Adam and Adam told her. And Paul was simply making a comparison of Eve with this female false teacher who was similarly deceived. Both of our assigned readings will present this argument in more detail for you.

Remember back to your case study with Rebecca at the beginning of the unit. Here was a teacher, who was passing on second hand information that was wrong to others with results that were in that case literally deadly. Stopping that kind of behaviour called for drastic methods, even firing the teacher immediately in order to stop the spread of such dangerous information. He had not been trained properly in what he was teaching, but only got information second hand from the internet and either it was wrong in the first place, or he didn’t understand it well enough to teach it properly. Holding a teacher to exceptionally high standards is critical in all situations, including teachers of the faith.

In summary the application point from this passage in I Timothy is clear. Whoever, teaches must be equipped in sound biblical truth in order to teach. He or she must be trained properly. Otherwise they are vulnerable to false teaching. If you are a woman and desire to be a teacher/preacher of the word, it is **mandatory** that you are a student of the Word. And that you understand how to rightly study and apply it. If you are a Pastor not only are you responsible to study the Word yourself but you are to ensure all members of your congregation have equal access to be equipped for leadership and ministry. This will only strengthen your church and protect you all from deception and false teaching.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

Please answer these questions as if you were the pastor of this congregation.

If some leaders from your congregation were going from house to house teaching false doctrine, what would you do to stop it? Would you treat those who are leading the movement differently from those who are simply passing on what they received. Explain why?

What makes people vulnerable to deception in your context?

What can be done to enable people to be less vulnerable to deception?

Readings

Why Not Women?

A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*

By Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton

CHAPTER 16: DO NOT PERMIT A WOMAN TO TEACH (Part One of 1 Timothy 2:1-15)

By David Hamilton

Now let's look at the third difficult passage regarding women in ministry. Once again, we begin with the setting. We must first understand the situation Paul was addressing if we are to understand what he was saying to his protégé Timothy. Paul was writing sometime between his first and second imprisonment in Rome. It had been almost ten years since he had founded the church in Ephesus, which Timothy was now pastoring.¹

A DARK AND FRIGHTENING STEW

To appreciate the situation that Timothy faced in Ephesus, we need to know something about the city itself. Ephesus had to be intimidating when Timothy first arrived. The huge, golden image of Artemis (called Diana by the Romans) was placed within the columns of her temple so that she could be easily seen from the sea. As Timothy came into port, then walked to the city center on Marble Street, the temple of Artemis loomed over everything. After all, it was the greatest of the seven wonders of the ancient world.² It took 120 years to build the structure Timothy stood and looked up at. Entire mountains were quarried for its foundations. The temple was larger than the playing field of an Olympic stadium. It had one hundred marble columns, each soaring five stories high. Color and gold were lavished everywhere.

The next impression that must have hit Timothy was the squalid moral stew that was Ephesus. The city was the center of a worldwide following for Artemis, the fertility goddess with two dozen bare breasts, also known as the Great Mother of Asia. Ovid wrote that the temple's orgies and religious prostitutes kept a young man's eyes fixed with lust and caused a young maiden's cheeks to redden.³ Stirred into this were the orgiastic rites of other mystery religions, witchcraft, and the Roman worship of Caesar. In fact, though Ephesus was also known as a political and educational center, much of its economy was based on its occult activities. Pilgrims came from all over the world to its myriad temples and throngs of occult practitioners.

When Paul and his team came to Ephesus, they made so many converts that the city's economy was threatened. Their evangelistic work stirred up the unholy nest of money interests wedded to Artemis worship, and it all came down on their heads.⁴ Paul's team had long gone, but Ephesus remained a great spiritual battleground for Timothy, the young pastor.

PERSECUTION FROM WITHOUT, HERESY WITHIN

As Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, the church at Ephesus was undergoing tremendous difficulties. The Jews and pagan religious leaders continued persecuting it. As if that weren't enough, false teachers within the church were promoting heresy. Timothy definitely had his hands full!

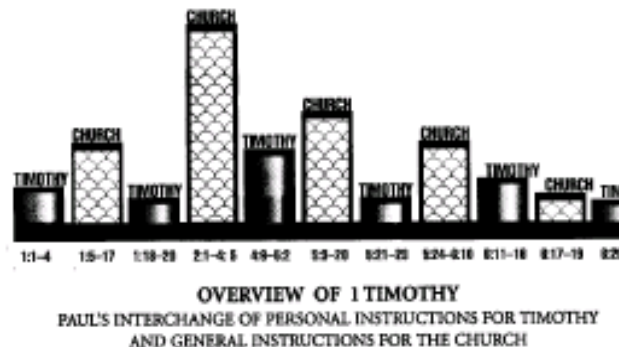
So, let's get the big picture of Paul's letter.

OVERVIEW OF I TIMOTHY

As we read through this Epistle of Paul to his "true son in the faith," two things stand out:

- Paul's concern for Timothy
- Paul's concern for the church at Ephesus

These two things are shown in the very way that Paul wrote the letter. Paul went back and forth continuously between these two topics--personal instruction to Timothy and teaching on the ministry of the church. As we've seen before, this back-and-forth style of writing is called a literary interchange, or an A-B-A-B structure.



WHAT PAUL THOUGHT MOST IMPORTANT

The first Epistle to Timothy took shape as Paul alternated between his concern for Timothy and his concern for the church. However, as you look at these eleven parts, it's clear that Paul emphasized one part more than any other. The longest part of his A-B-A-B structure is I Timothy 2:1 through I Timothy 4:5 in which Paul poured out his concern for the church at Ephesus. It is within this section that we our difficult passage, I Timothy 2:1-15.

As with our other two difficult passages, it will help us first to look at the structure. Paul used particularization and chiasm again, but within an A-B-A-B interchange! The overall principle is, God wants to save everyone. The particular examples are what God wants to do with men and women. Within the last example, women, Paul used a mini-chiasm. He began by talking about women in general, then switched to a particular woman, then switched back to women in general. The graph on the next page should help you visualize it.

What was Paul saying here? Was he really saying that women should not teach, here in a church where Priscilla had been a founding leader? A church where she had spent much time along with husband, Aquila, correcting the early errors of Apollos, disciplining him for leadership?⁵ Was Paul, who had asked the church in Rome to receive the woman minister Phoebe with all due honor,⁶ now contradicting himself, telling Timothy never to allow women to be leaders in the church?

Before we answer these questions, let's look at the very important foundation that Paul laid in the first seven verses of I Timothy 2.



MIRROR STRUCTURES

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-15

I urge, then, first if all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all persons to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the person Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all humans – the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed as a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a teacher of the truth to the Gentiles.

MEN

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

WOMEN

Likewise, I want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

A WOMAN

²A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ³I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ⁴For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ⁵And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ^{15a}But she will be saved through the childbearing

WOMEN

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

GOD'S FOREVER DREAM

Paul began this passage saying, "I urge, then, first of all . . ." ⁸The word *then* could also be translated "therefore," linking what Paul had just said with what was to come.

Look at the first chapter of I Timothy. Here was a church in deep trouble. Her persecutors were having a heyday from outside the church, and false teachers were wreaking havoc from within. The natural tendency would have been to withdraw into some self-protective mode. But Paul said that this was the time to be proactive. It was a time of great opportunity, a time to pray.

Opposition is no cause to retreat. Paul reflected this attitude when writing of his own experience in Ephesus: "A great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."⁹ That's the proper reaction when you find yourself being bombarded in the midst of heated spiritual warfare. Pray, realizing that God is opening a great door of opportunity for you.

Paul gave the believers at Ephesus four different words for prayer. How should they pray? In every possible way! They were to leave no stone unturned in the place of prayer. No one was to be excluded from their prayers, either. There were no limits to this kind of praying. There was no one alive on earth beyond the power of their prayer.

Why pray so intensely? Paul said, ". . . that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."¹⁰ Those who have known what it's like to live under persecution can

really appreciate this. Those who have lived through the pain of a church torn apart by controversy and false teaching can also relate to Paul's heart cry. This was a desperate cry for survival. It was the hope of believers going through anguishing times while longing for peaceful and quiet lives.

The Greek word for *quiet* that Paul used here will be key to understanding verses later on in this chapter.¹¹ For now, let us note that it summed up the desired goal for all believers, male and female. But Paul urged prayer not just so that believers could enjoy peaceful lives but because they should feel what God feels and want what He wants.

THE HEART OF THE HEART OF THE HEART

"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all [persons] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."¹² These words are the core of this passage, the central reason for the whole Epistle, indeed the heart of the entire New Testament. In fact, they give us a glimpse into the very heart of God. They are among the most intimate, most tender words in the entire Bible. You reveal your dreams and deepest longings only to your closest friends. You wouldn't make yourself that vulnerable to anyone else. By sharing these words with us, God bares His heart, drawing us in close as His dearest friends, His most trusted confidantes. Wow!

You may have noticed that I changed one word from the NIV to better reflect the original Greek. Throughout the first seven verses of 1 Timothy 2, Paul did not use *aner*, the Greek word for "men." Instead, he used *anthropos*, the gender-inclusive Greek word best translated as "person" or "human." He continued using *anthropos*: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the [person] Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all [humans]"¹³

Why is this important? Are we trying to be politically correct here? No. These are the words Paul actually chose. Paul was going out of his way to make it clear that God's love was for *every human being*. Even when he referred to Jesus, Paul used *anthropos/person* instead of *aner/man*. Jesus became a human so that He could be the mediator for every man and woman.

In this one sweeping statement, many lies of the ancient teachers were swept away. Woman was not a separate creation. She wasn't subhuman or merely an occasion for temptation. She was an equal recipient of God's love and Jesus' extravagant sacrifice.

IF YOU RUSH PAST THIS, YOU MISS THE ENTIRE MEANING

All of God's will--His most intense longing, His forever dream, the driving passion of His heart--is summed up in these verses. Everything God has ever done from the Garden to the present has been motivated by this dream. This is why God chose Abraham, why He gave Abraham's children the Law and the Promised Land. This is why He faithfully pursued them in His love, generation after generation, correcting them when they strayed, delivering them when they returned to Him. This is why He sent them His messengers—judges and prophets--one after another, after another, after another. This is why He sent His only Son as the ransom for humanity's sins. All of His acts have been motivated by His desire to redeem every person, every human, every *anthropos*. Everyone, everyone, everyone.

What a shame that so many rush over these words to tackle the difficult issues raised later. They miss this intimate glimpse into the heart of God's love. But they also misunderstand the words that follow. For unless we keep this perspective of God's forever dream before us, we miss it all.

PAUL TALKED TO THE MEN

Paul urged the whole church to pursue God's dream for all to be saved. Then he turned to the men of the church and told them their part: "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing."¹⁴ For the first time in this passage, he used the Greek word for "males," *aner*. He told the men what he wanted to see in their lives.

Paul's desire grew out of God's desire to see all persons saved. God's dream had spurred the apostle into action.¹⁵ Now the apostle spurred all the men in the Ephesian church into action. They were to pray with holy hands, without anger or disputing. They were to pray in the opposite spirit of those attacking the church from without and from within. The men of the church were to live differently than both the unredeemed pagans persecuting them and the unrepentant teachers of heresy.

NEXT, PAUL SPOKE TO ALL THE WOMEN / "A WOMAN" / ALL THE WOMEN

As Paul turned to speak to women regarding their responsibilities in the church, he began a mini-chiasm. First he spoke to the women in general, then he gave specific instructions to one woman, then he spoke again to all the women. He began by saying, "Likewise, I want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."¹⁶

The NIV begins this verse with "I also." It would communicate Paul's intent more clearly if *also* were translated "likewise" or "in the same way."¹⁷ This word in the Greek is like a literary equal sign. Some have tried to use this passage to say that the roles of men and women are different in the church. But Paul deliberately chose this word to highlight the similarities, not the differences, of men's and women's roles. Though the text does not specifically exhort women to pray, it is implied or suggested by the way Paul chose to begin this sentence. This is probably another example of Paul's use of ellipsis.¹⁸ Paul wanted both men and women to pray and live in such a way that they promoted God's forever dream.

The main idea of this passage was that Paul wanted everyone to pray.¹⁹ He wanted the men to pray, and *in the same way* he wanted the women to pray. It was logical, clear writing for him to tell both groups to pray in a godly manner--men, in holiness and without anger, and women, with decency and propriety.

Chrysostom was one of the early church commentators who understood this and added the words "to pray" to this verse to complete its meaning.²⁰ If this is correct, "the translation [of I Timothy 2:9] will be, 'In the same way I desire that women should pray, dressed in becoming manner.'"²¹

Why the Fuss over Gold, Pearls, and Braided Hair?

When we look at these words of Paul, they seem quaint, even legalistic. Was Paul the great apostle of freedom caught up in petty taboos? What's wrong with braided hair, gold, and pearls?

Just as Paul urged the men to live their lives by a different standard, here he was warning the women to avoid things that would detract from their witness. We've seen that Ephesus was a sensuous, immoral city. Furthermore, in New Testament times, ostentation in dress was in itself considered a mark of promiscuity.²² One author of antiquity said, "A wife who likes adornment is not faithful."²³ Not only that, the Romans prized pearls above all other jewels.²⁴ Wearing pearls was considered the most ostentatious display of vanity.²⁵ Paul wanted Christian women to focus on inner virtues and live in a way that was "appropriate for women who profess to worship God."²⁶

This word *profess* is key within this passage. In the original, it conveys a sense of proclamation, profession, and expertise.²⁷ In fact, it is one of eight Greek verbs in the New Testament formed by adding a prefix to the word for *messenger*. All of these verbs have to do with communication. Paul used seven of the eight in his letters:²⁸

- to tell²⁹
- to announce³⁰
- to herald³¹
- to profess³²
- to evangelize³³
- to proclaim³⁴
- to declare³⁵

You can see that the word *profess* and its linguistic cousins are linked to the very heart and soul of Christian ministry. You can't profess something in silence, nor can you profess something in private. When Paul said the women in the church should dress appropriately because they *professed* God, he was showing that they were involved in public ministry, communicating the Gospel to others.

A FALSE TEACHER SILENCED

Now Paul changed the tone of his voice and the focus of his attention. He spoke to a particular woman: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But she will be saved through the childbearing."³⁶

Structure Gives a Clue

The structure of Paul's communication has been very clear so far. Paul laid out the general principle--God's redeeming love for all humanity and our need to pray.³⁷ Then he gave two examples of how redeeming love should look when it's lived out: first for the men of the church³⁸ and then for the women.³⁹ In verse 10, Paul spoke to women involved in spreading the Gospel. As he did so, he remembered one woman who had perhaps played a prominent role in the church at Ephesus. So in verse 11, he stopped speaking in broad, general terms ("everyone," "men," "women") and addressed the case of this one woman. How can we say that? This is based on a very clear grammatical shift in the Greek. From verse 11 to the middle of verse 15, the plural nouns are gone. They're all singular: "a **woman**," "**she** must be silent," and "**she** will be saved through the childbearing." Then, in the second half of verse 15, Paul returned to the plural, "if **they** continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." So, as Paul spoke to the women again, his grammar formed a small chiasm:

- verses 9-10: "women" (plural)
- verses 11-15a: "a woman" (singular)
- verse 15b: "women" (plural)

One Certain Woman

Why did Paul make this dramatic switch from plural to singular and back to plural? I suggest that he had a specific Ephesian woman in mind as he wrote these words to Timothy. The context suggests that she was a vocal promoter of the false teachings troubling the Ephesian church. Perhaps she was one of the leaders of this heretical group. Besides the shift in grammar to the singular, several other clues point strongly to such a scenario.

Clue #1: The Pronouns Paul Used

In several places where Paul told Timothy to deal with false teachers, he used gender-inclusive pronouns. Words like these indicate that women were also involved:

- "if *anyone* teaches false doctrines..."⁴⁰
- "*some*," both men and women, "had wandered away" from a "sincere faith"

and "have shipwrecked their faith," because in abandoning their faith they "followed deceiving spirits and things taught by demons..."⁴¹
-- "command *certain [ones-both men and women]* not to teach false doctrines."⁴²

Paul told Timothy to silence false teachers-male *and* female.

Clue #2: Women Involved in Heresies

Paul urged Timothy to avoid "old wives' tales,"⁴³ which suggests older women were among the false teachers. Younger women were swept into it, too, for Paul spoke of young widows who were "saying things they ought not to."⁴⁴ Paul said that women who had succumbed to the false teaching were "weak-willed women . . . loaded down with sins . . . swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth."⁴⁵

Obviously, Paul did not see heresy as the domain of one gender. Both men and women had participated in the heresy that was tearing the Ephesian church apart. Paul declared that these "evil [persons] and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived."⁴⁶ His words were designed to correct this situation.

Clue #3: False Teachers, Named and Unnamed

Though Paul spoke of the group that had been led astray, he also referred to several individuals most responsible for this deception:

- Hymenaeus⁴⁷
- Alexander⁴⁸
- Philetus⁴⁹

He also told Timothy that Phygelus, Hermogenes, and Demas had deserted him.⁵⁰ It should not be surprising that here, in I Timothy 2:11-15a, Paul advised Timothy what to do about a particular woman who had joined forces with those propagating a false gospel. Why didn't Paul mention her by name? There were other times when Paul didn't mention an individual by name but made it clear about whom he was talking. He did this when writing to the church in Corinth about a man committing incest,⁵¹ and when writing to Titus concerning an unnamed yet specific person: "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."⁵²

The context suggests that Paul had a particular person in mind. Paul's words to Titus in Crete are particularly helpful as we consider the unnamed woman in the Ephesian church. Like Timothy in Ephesus, Titus had been left in Crete to "straighten out what was left unfinished"⁵³ and confront a group of false teachers who, according to Paul, "must be silenced."⁵⁴ The "divisive person"⁵⁵ was apparently the ringleader of those who were "teaching things they ought not to teach."⁵⁶ Paul didn't need to mention him by name because both he and Titus knew exactly who was at the heart of the problem in Crete.

Perhaps Paul did not name these individuals--the contentious person in Crete, the man committing incest in Corinth, and the woman teaching heresy in Ephesus--because he hoped they would be restored. His pastoral heart longed for each of these people to be reconciled to the church. Maybe he avoided using their names to make it easier for them after they repented. This would have been in keeping with the process Jesus gave us for restoring believers who sin.⁵⁷

It isn't surprising that Paul told Timothy to silence this woman without naming her. What is surprising, even shocking, is the way he named the men involved in the heresy--Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus. Perhaps Paul had given up on them.

Clue #4: Back to Eve

Still another clue points to the existence of a deceived woman promoting heresy in the Ephesian church. Paul gave the reason this woman should be silenced by immediately pointing to another deceived woman--Eve.

Paul explained what Timothy was to do with this deceived woman. Then, just to make it really clear to him, Paul used the word *for* or *because*⁵⁸ to compare her situation to that of Eve in the Garden. He reminded Timothy that Adam sinned with his eyes open, but Eve did so because she was deceived. Paul held Adam more accountable for his sin because Adam wasn't deceived when he decided to disobey God.⁵⁹ However, Eve's sin was the fruit, not of knowing disobedience but of deception.⁶⁰ One of the major themes of this entire passage was stopping the deception in the Ephesian church. Eve was deceived, and so was this woman who was to be silenced. Both were acting on false beliefs.

What these two women had in common was that they both had believed a lie. As a result, they both had sinned. The sin of both had affected the lives of a large number of people in a very negative way.

Paul wanted to put an end to this: an end to the sin, an end to the deception, and an end to the conditions that made deception possible. He realized that deception is a fertile field in which sin can easily grow. He understood that the women of his day were more prone to being deceived because they had been excluded from educational opportunities. Paul intended to put an end to this deception. This could be the first step in restoring not only the deceived woman but also the entire church of Ephesus.

CHAPTER 17: PAUL'S GRACIOUS SOLUTION (Part Two of 1 Timothy 2:1-15)

By David Hamilton

Now let's go back and look closer at what Paul said Timothy should do about this woman in Ephesus. Even though the woman was deceived and had deceived many, Paul gave wonderful, redeeming instructions on how to deal with her.

Paul's first word was that "a woman should learn."¹ This phrase would better reflect the original Greek if it were translated "*must* learn." This is not just a suggestion but an imperative. It is very important to realize that this is the *only* direct command Paul gave in this whole chapter. "Paul did not simply say that woman '*may* learn' or '*should* learn' or that woman should be '*allowed* to learn.' Woman *must* learn. By implication, [this woman] must be instructed."² Timothy was expected to make sure that this woman was given an education.

What a gracious response toward someone who had been causing so much harm! Paul realized that the problem lay primarily in the fact that like all the women of her day, this woman had been excluded from the opportunity to learn.³ Whether this woman was a Gentile or a Jew, she would have been at an educational disadvantage. This had made her more susceptible to false teaching. Because Paul understood this, he extended more grace to her than he did to Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus. These three men had sinned knowingly. So Paul "handed [them] over to Satan."⁴ But he handed the woman over to a teacher. Which would you prefer?

The antidote to deception is learning the truth. Therefore, Paul demanded that this woman be taught, opening a door of opportunity that society had shut. As we have already seen, this was a revolutionary stance for Paul, who completely broke with the double standard of the Greeks, Romans, and Jews. The Gospel not only permitted but also *required* equal educational opportunity for women.

Paul went on to say how this woman should learn: "in quietness and full submission."⁵⁵ Again, this qualification on how she should learn was not a rebuke; he was not saying that she should just sit down and shut up. The noun used in verses 11 and 12 is related to the word used in verse two of this same chapter, where Paul said that the goal of all believers was to live "peaceful and quiet lives." "Quietness" implies compliance with the law rather

than resistance, and harmony with one's neighbors rather than wrangling and hostility . . . peace rather than argumentation."⁶

Paul wasn't requiring anything different of this woman than what he required of every church member in Ephesus throughout this passage. It was the same quality the men should have when they prayed "without anger or disputing"⁷ and the women should have, behaving "with decency and propriety."⁸

TO LEARN LIKE THE STUDENTS OF THE RABBIS

In fact, the phrase "silence and submission" was a frequent formula in the Near East for a model student. "Before, throughout, and after Paul's time, the rabbis were agreed that silence was an admirable attribute for the pious scholar."⁹ "As Simon, the son of Gamaliel, explained, 'All my days I grew up among the sages, and I have found nothing better for a person than silence.'"¹⁰

Any pupil must have a teachable attitude. This is normal for every disciple. Paul's words made it clear that it was no different for a woman than it was for a man who wished to learn. "A woman [like a man] cannot learn if she does not listen and yield to the instructor."¹¹ This is the same attitude James described when he said, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak."¹² This attitude makes for the very best of students. Paul's desire for the woman whom he commanded to learn in quietness and submission in verse 11 was that she become nothing less than that--the very best student. She was "to be learning in the same manner as did rabbinic students," for silence was considered "a positive attribute for rabbinic students."¹³

Another important thing to note is the way Jewish rabbis linked learning and teaching--you could not have one without the other. A student was taught in order that he could teach others.¹⁴ According to the rabbis, "[Scripture states]: to learn, to teach, to observe and to do; consequently there are four [duties associated with each commandment]."¹⁵ All of these were expected of every Jewish man. But women were for the most part excluded from this obligation and privilege.¹⁶

The rabbis did not get the idea of excluding women from learning and teaching from the Old Testament. But they did learn from Scripture that learning, doing, and teaching were linked together. For instance, Ezra "devoted himself to the *study* and *observance* of the Law of the Lord, and to *teaching* its decrees and laws in Israel."¹⁷ Teaching was the normal end product of learning.

Paul, however, commanded this woman to learn but not to teach. Why? Because she had been teaching false doctrine. Therefore, Paul set aside the normal link between learning and teaching in her case. For a season she was being disciplined, corrected. She couldn't be allowed to continue spreading false doctrine. It was time for her to abstain from teaching altogether and dedicate herself to study alone.

OTHERS WHO WERE SILENCED

Paul silenced this woman not because she was a woman but because she was teaching false doctrine to others. First Timothy 2:12 forbade her "to teach a heresy which was creating serious problems for the church. She [was] certainly not the only one whose teaching must be stopped, however."¹⁸ It was a matter not of gender but of deception, as it had been throughout his letters to Timothy. Paul...

--wrote about "evil **persons**," men and women who were "deceiving and being deceived."¹⁹

--told Timothy to "command certain **ones** [both men and women] not to teach false doctrines any longer."²⁰

--warned Timothy that "**[s]ome** [both men and women] have wandered away...and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about ..."²¹

--said that **they** had to be silenced, otherwise "their teaching will spread like gangrene."²²

WHY DOES SHE GET ALL THE PRESS?

Paul told Timothy to silence false teachers. Whether male or female, they must be stopped--Hymenaeus, Alexander, Philetus, this unnamed woman, or anyone else.

Isn't it amazing? Even though Paul dealt with several men in a similar way, it's the woman who has received all the attention. Why does she get so much press? Paul handed Hymenaeus and Alexander "over to Satan, to be taught not to blaspheme,"²³ in other words, to stop them from speaking untruths about God. Paul silenced them. False teaching is false no matter who--male or female--is giving it, and it must be stopped.

PAUL WAS NOT SILENCING GODLY WOMEN

"There is nothing in this passage to support the silencing of godly women, or forbidding their teaching in church, their call to any form of Christian service, or the use of all the gifts the triune God has bestowed upon them."²⁴ How do we know that the words in verses 11 and 12 were not a universal prohibition against women teaching? Recall that just two verses earlier, in 1 Timothy 2:10, Paul spoke of those things that were "appropriate for *women who profess* to worship God." Paul expected believing women to be communicating their faith in both deed and word.

We also see Paul's attitude toward women teachers when he reminded Timothy of his spiritual heritage, "the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed."²⁵ Where did Timothy get this "good teaching"? From two godly women. Paul said, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."²⁶ Paul urged Timothy to "continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."²⁷ If Paul didn't approve of women teaching the Bible, he certainly missed a golden opportunity to correct Timothy here! Instead, he put a spotlight on these two women for the important role they played, teaching this future leader.

Some may say that this was different because Timothy was obviously young when his mother and grandmother taught him. Indeed, I know of no churches that prohibit women from teaching little boys in Sunday school. But if these words in 1 Timothy 2:11 and 12 were absolute prohibitions against all women teachers, nothing was said about making exceptions on the basis of age. Nor was subject matter mentioned. Paul didn't say, "Do not permit a woman to teach theology, but other subjects are okay." If this is an absolute against women teaching males, then women schoolteachers must not teach boys how to read, or write, or do arithmetic. In fact, mothers engaged in homeschooling their sons must be stopped, too!

Ridiculous? Yes. Recall Loren's words in chapter 2 that related how foolish it is to convert Bible statements relative to a situation into absolute truths.

PAUL WANTED RELIABLE WOMEN TO TEACH

Another indication of Paul's attitude toward women teachers was given in 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul told Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable [persons, that is, men and women] who will also be qualified to teach others."²⁸

If Paul had intended to prohibit women in teaching ministry, he missed another great opportunity here. There would have been no better place to use the Greek word *aner*, "males," rather than *anthropos*, "persons," to settle the issue once and for all. But no. Paul used the gender-inclusive "persons...qualified to teach." This was no accident. It was the

deliberate, inspired Word of God. "Far from prohibiting them from teaching, it appears to be a strong exhortation that responsible women should make the proclamation of the truth a very high priority! Those of either sex who are able to teach hereby receive a summons to make known the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ."²⁹

WHAT ABOUT AUTHORITY?

Now let's look at the second part of 1 Timothy 2:12. The meaning of the Greek word³⁰ that is translated "to have authority" in the NIV is cloudy. Why? For one thing, it's a word that appears only once in the New Testament. Also, this word appears very little in other ancient literature. This makes it difficult for experts to agree on its meaning.³¹ Scholars continue to debate whether this Greek word carries a positive meaning (such as rightly using authority to serve others) or a negative one (such as domineering, manipulating, even murdering others). The main thing for us to note is that this is not the normal New Testament word for authority.³² It was an unusual word for an unusual situation.

In any case, we have to go back to the context of what Paul was talking about. A godless woman was teaching false doctrines and leading in a harmful way. It follows that she should not be allowed to hold a position of authority in the church. She didn't meet the qualifications for spiritual leadership that Paul gave Timothy.³³ Because she was not above reproach, either in word or in deed, disciplinary action was called for.

THAT'S NOT THE CHRISTIAN WAY

It's worth mentioning that Paul didn't say anything anywhere in his letters to Timothy about a man having authority over a woman. In fact, among the redeemed, no one is to exercise authority in an authoritarian way over another person of either gender. Paul made it clear that the false teachers were the ones trying to control people. Jesus said that His followers were to be radically different from the way the world ran things:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."³⁴

ABOUT EVE

We've already seen how Paul compared this woman to Eve, for they both had been deceived. But there are a couple of other considerations as we look at 1 Timothy 2:13-14, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." These words could indicate one of two things:

1. On the one hand, Paul may have been refuting **the content** of the false teaching. There are indications that the false teachers were distorting the truth about how God created the world.³⁵ Perhaps the worshipers of the mother goddess Artemis were denying the biblical Creation story, saying that woman was the source or head of man.³⁶
2. On the other hand, Paul might have simply been referring to **the way that Eve became deceived**. If we look at the order of events in the Garden, God created man,

then told him not eat from the tree of knowledge.³⁷ Only later did God create woman.³⁸ So when the serpent questioned Eve, "Did God really say...?"³⁹ Eve had to rely on secondhand information relayed to her by Adam.

Eve didn't become deceived because of some inherent weakness in women. God said that everything He created was good, including the first woman. No. If Eve was deceived, it was because Adam didn't teach her well. If he had done a good job as a teacher, Eve would have known exactly what God had and hadn't said to Adam. The very fact that Adam silently "stood by her side during the whole sorry episode"⁴⁰ places the blame squarely on his shoulders for not faithfully passing on the Word of the Lord. No wonder God first addressed Adam when their transgression came to light.⁴¹

Whichever view you take, it points out the need for good teaching. Good teaching answers the distortions of heresy. The story of Adam and Eve shows how important it is to faithfully teach others so that no one falls into deception. That is why Paul's one command in this chapter was: The woman must learn.

SAVED THROUGH THE CHILDBEARING

Some would try to take Paul's instructions to Timothy to mean that women are more easily deceived than men, therefore not to be trusted as Bible teachers. Paul never said that. He wasn't defining universal gender traits here. He was simply talking about two women who had been deceived, then had fallen into sin--nothing more. To try to stretch this into some statement of inborn strengths and weaknesses in men and women twists the text.

Eve's deception led to sin, according to verse 14, as did this woman's deception in Ephesus. So Paul said (still in the singular), "[S]he will be saved through the childbearing." What does this mean? Was Paul saying that this deceived woman would be reconciled to the Lord and to the church if she had a baby? If having a child were a requirement for women to be saved, what would that mean for single women or for childless wives?

The phrase "the childbearing" is unique. It isn't found anywhere else in the New Testament. Although a variety of interpretations have been proposed, one thing that is important to notice is that this word isn't a verb. On the contrary, it's a noun, dramatically preceded by the definite article ("*the* childbearing") to point to one particular childbearing.

I believe that Paul was still drawing parallels with Eve, the other deceived woman who was in need of salvation. In Eden, God prophesied of "the childbearing" when He said: "I will put enmity between [the serpent] and the woman, and between [the serpent's offspring] and hers; he will crush [the serpent's] head, and [the serpent] will strike his heel."⁴² That's how the Gospel was first proclaimed, the Messiah first promised. And Paul repeated the promise here, saying that this unnamed Ephesian woman could still be saved through Him, the promised Child born to redeem all persons.

Paul began this passage with the most glorious affirmation of God's loving heart for the lost. "The childbearing" refers to the one mediator between God and persons, the person Christ Jesus, the promised seed of Eve, the Child born of a woman.⁴³ The issue at stake here was salvation, not motherhood. Women aren't saved by getting pregnant and having babies. They're saved by the child who was born--Jesus! Throughout this passage, Paul was talking about how men and women are redeemed, not about how they procreate. The central truth of this entire passage is Jesus and God's desire for all to be saved through the promised childbearing.

Jesus was the focus throughout Paul's letter to Timothy. Paul began by writing, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."⁴⁴ By pointing to Jesus, Paul hoped to win over the unbelieving persecutors and correct the false teachers. Jesus was at the heart of this difficult passage, for it was only through His death and Resurrection that God's forever dream could come true, only through Him could believers "live peaceful and quiet lives."⁴⁵ It was all about Jesus.

Paul's pastoral heart was reaching out to this particular woman in Ephesus who had caused so much trouble. Paul was saying that she could be saved through the childbearing--that is, through Jesus. She must learn. What must she learn? She must learn about Jesus so that she might be fully restored to God through Him.

BACK TO THE PLURAL

Then Paul extended his pastoral concern to all women. In mid-sentence, he went back to the plural, saying that Jesus was what all women needed. Salvation would be theirs "if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."⁴⁶ This was the rounding off of Paul's mini-chiasm. Even as he wanted "a woman" to be saved, he wanted all women to be saved. What a fitting conclusion to a passage that began by declaring that God wants all persons to be saved through the person of His Son Jesus.

This list of four spiritual characteristics--faith, love, and holiness with propriety--is amazingly similar to the four Paul laid out at the very beginning of his letter to Timothy: "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."⁴⁷ Why is this important? It's important because this was a radical departure from everything these people had been taught before. Both Jews and Gentiles defined virtue for women by an entirely different standard. But not Paul. He expected the same response to the Gospel, the same moral standard for both men and women. He followed through on what Jesus had already demonstrated. The ancient double standard of law and behavior was dead. Membership in the family of God was now offered equally to men and women. And service for God was no longer an exclusive male domain but a shared enterprise.

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Chapter 16 Endnotes:

¹ The book of Acts concludes by saying, "For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28:30-31). The New Testament is silent as to what happened at the end of these two years. The early church historian Eusebius picks up the story for us. He says, "Luke also, who committed the Acts of the Apostles to writing, finished his narrative at this point by the statement that Paul spent two whole years in Rome in freedom, and preached the word of God without hindrance. Tradition has it that after defending himself the apostle was again sent on the ministry of preaching, and coming a second time to the same city suffered martyrdom under Nero. During this imprisonment he wrote the second epistle to Timothy, indicating at the same time that his first defense had taken place and that his martyrdom was at hand." Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History, Volume 11*, trans. J.E.L. Oulton (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1973), 2.22.1-2.

² Philo of Byzantium described the seven wonders circa 225 B.C.. He praised the temple of Artemis at Ephesus as the greatest of them all, declaring that it was "the only house of the gods. Whoever looks will be convinced that a change of place has occurred: that the heavenly world of immortality has been placed on earth." Philo of Byzantium, *On the Seven Wonders*, 6.1. Quoted in John and Elizabeth Romer, *The Seven Wonders of the World: A History of the Modern Imagination* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995).

³ Ovid, "The Heroides 20.5-8, 201-212" in *Ovid. The Heroides and The Amores*, trans. Grant Showerman (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press).

⁴ See Acts 19:23-41

⁵ Acts 18:26

⁶ Refer to earlier references to Phoebe in chapters 3 and 11.

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:1.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 16:9.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:2.

¹¹ The adjective *quiet* is *hesuchios*. Its cognate noun *hesuchia* will appear twice later on in 1 Timothy 2:11-12. See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix N.

¹² 1 Timothy 2:3-4; NIV text modified by authors.

¹³ 1 Timothy 2:5-6a; NIV text modified by authors.

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 2:8.

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 2:7.

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 2:9-10; NIV text modified by authors.

¹⁷ See Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 682. Thayer's lexicon states that this word means "in like manner, likewise."

¹⁸ We first considered the meaning of *ellipsis* when we looked at Ephesians 5:22 in chapter 10 of this book. Once again, the definition of an ellipsis, according to Microsoft *@ Bookshelf 98*, is "The omission of a word or phrase necessary for a complete syntactical construction but not necessary for understanding." For example, it is not uncommon to say something like, "I'm going to the store. Bob is, too." Though we don't say it, we understand that "Bob is *going to the store*, too." In a similar way, Paul's statement, "The men should pray. Likewise the women..." should be understood by the reader to mean, "Likewise the women *should pray*..."

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 2:1.

²⁰ Gordon, "The Ministry of Women," *World Missionary Review*, 2.

²¹ John Chrysostom. Quoted in Charles Kingsley Barrett, "Pastoral Epistles" in *The New Clarendon Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 55. Note also Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 102-103: "Although the grammar is not clear on this point, the 'likewise' of 2:9 probably suggests that Paul, who has just instructed the men how to pray, now turns to instructing the women in the same way. As in 1 Corinthians 11, women are not silenced in church; they are permitted to pray."

²² Richard Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, "1 Timothy 2:9-10 Revisited," *Priscilla Papers*, 8.1 (Winter 1994), 4. Because Ephesus was so filled with immorality, Paul's instructions in this regard were especially relevant.

²³ *Sentences of Sextus* 513. Quoted in Gordon Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 71. Another writer of antiquity wrote, "The temperate, freeborn woman must live with her legal husband adorned with modesty, clad in neat, simple, white dress without extravagance or excess. She must avoid clothing that is either entirely purple or is streaked with purple and gold, for that kind of dress is worn by hetaerae [that is, prostitutes] when they stalk the masses of men. But the adornment of a woman who wishes to please only one man, her own husband, is her character and not her clothing. For the freeborn woman must be beautiful to her own husband, not to the men in the neighborhood." Pseudo Melissa, *Letter to Kleareta*. Quoted in Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 106.

²⁴ Davis, *Old Rome*, 97-98.

²⁵ Pliny was utterly shocked when some women went to such an extreme that "they even use [pearls] on their feet, and fix them not only to the laces of their sandals but all over their slippers." Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 9.56.114.

²⁶ 1 Timothy 2:10.

²⁷ Kroeger and Kroeger, "Timothy Revisited" 5.

²⁸ The one that is not used is *exagello* ("to publish") and is found only in 1 Peter 2:9.

²⁹ *Anagello* is found in Romans 15:21, 2 Corinthians 7:7.

³⁰ *Apagello* is found in 1 Corinthians 14:25, 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

³¹ *Diagello* is found in Romans 9:17.

³² *Epagello* is found in Romans 4:2-3; Galatians 3:19; 1 Timothy 2:10, 6:21; Titus 1:2.

³³ *Euagello* is found in Romans 1:15, 10:15a, 10:15b, 15:20; 1 Corinthians 1:17, 9:16a, 9:16b, 9:18, 15:1, 15:2; 2 Corinthians 10:16, 11:7; Galatians 1:8a, 1:8b, 1:9, 1:11, 1:16, 1:23, 4:13; Ephesians 2:17, 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:6.

³⁴ *Katagello* is found in Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:1, 9:14, 11:26, Philippians 1:16, 1:18; Colossians 1:28.

³⁵ *Paragello* is found in 1 Corinthians 7:10, 11:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:4, 6, 10, 12; 1 Timothy 1:3, 4:11, 5:7, 6:13, 6:17.

³⁶ 1 Timothy 2:11-15a; NIV text modified by authors.

³⁷ 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

³⁸ 1 Timothy 2:8.

³⁹ 1 Timothy 2:9-10.

⁴⁰ 1 Timothy 6:3. Emphasis added.

⁴¹ 1 Timothy 1:6, 6:21, 4:1. Emphasis added.

⁴² 1 Timothy 1:3; NIV text modified by authors. Emphasis added.

⁴³ 1 Timothy 4:7.

⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 5:13.

⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 3:6-7.

⁴⁶ 2 Timothy 3:13; NIV text modified by authors to correctly translate *anthropos*.

⁴⁷ 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 2:17.

⁴⁸ 1 Timothy 1:20, 2 Timothy 4:14-15.

⁴⁹ 2 Timothy 2:17.

⁵⁰ 2 Timothy 1:15, 2 Timothy 4:10.

⁵¹ In 1 Corinthians 5:1, Paul stated, "[A] man has his father's wife." A few verses later Paul again speaks of "this man" (1 Corinthians 5:5). Though they were not mentioned by name, Paul clearly had a specific man and woman in mind. The notoriety of the case made it unnecessary for Paul to record their names. Both he and the Corinthians knew about whom he was talking.

⁵² Titus 3:10-11.

⁵³ Titus 1:5.

⁵⁴ Titus 1:11.

⁵⁵ Titus 3:10

⁵⁶ Titus 1:11.

⁵⁷ Matthew 18:15-17.

⁵⁸ 1 Timothy 2:13.

⁵⁹ Twice in his letters, Paul placed the blame for sin's entry into the world at Adam's feet: Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22. There is no such parallel statement made regarding Eve in Paul's writings.

⁶⁰ Sin is sin, and as such, it is never excusable. However, the Scriptures recognize the difference between sin committed deliberately and that done unknowingly. Jesus said, "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows" (Luke 12:47-48a). Paul seems to apply this principle in the differing discipline he gave to Hymenaeus and Alexander on the one hand and to the unnamed woman on the other. Likewise, this explains the differing judgment Paul had of Adam and Eve's actions.

CHAPTER 17 ENDNOTES:

¹ 1 Timothy 2:11, 2 Timothy 2:17.

² Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, 74. The author faithfully reflects the singular of the Greek text by using "woman" until the last phrase, wherein she uses the plural "women." My quotation corrects that, replacing the plural with the singular form in brackets.

³ "The Ephesian women were untaught. Education usually was not a privilege they shared in the Graeco-Roman world. Judaism [likewise] generally did not allow them to receive instruction." Haubert, *Women as Leaders*, 64. See also Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, 37-38, 55ff, and 110ff.

⁴ 1 Timothy 1:20.

⁵ 1 Timothy 2:11. See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix N and Appendix R for a complete study on these two key words. Please note that the phrase does not define "in submission" to whom. Is it to the teacher? To God? Or to the truth taught?

⁶ Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 68.

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:8.

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:9.

⁹ Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, 79.

¹⁰ M. Avot 1.17. Quoted in Aida Dina Besancon Spencer, "Eve at Ephesus: Should Women Be Ordained as Pastors According to the First Letter to Timothy 2:11-15?" *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Fall 1974), 218.

¹¹ Haubert, *Women as Leaders*, 64.

¹² James 1:19.

¹³ Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, 75.

¹⁴ "That when it is for the purpose of study the matter is different; as it has been taught: Thou shalt not learn to do--but thou mayest learn in order to understand and teach." B. Avodah Zarah 43b.

¹⁵ B. Sotah 37a-b.

¹⁶ See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, 109ff: Also, Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, 31.

¹⁷ Ezra 7:9-10. Emphasis added.

¹⁸ Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 60.

¹⁹ 2 Timothy 3:13. Note Paul's use of *anthropos*.

²⁰ 1 Timothy 1:3. Note Paul's use of gender-inclusive pronoun.

²¹ 1 Timothy 1:6-7. Note Paul's use of gender-inclusive pronoun.

²² 2 Timothy 2:17.

²³ 1 Timothy 1:20.

²⁴ Berkeley Mickelsen, "Who Are the Women in 1 Timothy 2:1-15? (Part II);" *Priscilla Papers*, 2.2 (Spring 1988), 6.

²⁵ 1 Timothy 4:6.

²⁶ 2 Timothy 1:5.

²⁷ 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

²⁸ Once again, the NIV's use of "men" here is potentially misleading. The Greek is the gender-inclusive *anthropos* and is thus more accurately translated "persons."

²⁹ Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 82.

³⁰ *Authentein*.

³¹ Experts do not agree on how this word emerged. "Etymologically, it means either 'to murder' or 'to exercise authority.'" Sharon Hodgkin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991), 134.

This "pivotal word ...has implications of killing, beginning, and copulating, [all of which] were elements of the mystery religions practiced in Asia Minor." Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 87.

Within its wide range of meanings are to begin something, to be primarily responsible for a condition or action (especially murder), to rule, to dominate, to usurp power or rights from another, to claim ownership, sovereignty, or authorship. Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 84.

³² The normal word for authority in the Greek New Testament is *exousia*. See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix M.

³³ 1 Timothy 3:1-13.

³⁴ Mark 10:42-45. This same teaching is also recorded in Matthew 20:25-28 and Luke 22:25-27. Note that the Greek words translated "authority" in the Gospel accounts were not *authentein* but words that are a derivative of the more usual *exousia*. See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix M.

³⁵ In 1 Timothy 4:3, Paul says, "They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth." The legalistic practices of the false teachers seem to have distorted the truth about how "God created." This may also be why Paul finds it necessary to add the phrase "who gives life to everything" in 1 Timothy 6:13 in order to define the nature of God.

³⁶ This may be the reason Paul uses the difficult word *authentein* in verse 12. For this reason, the Kroegers translate 1 Timothy 2:12 thus: "I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man." Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 189.

³⁷ Genesis 2:16-17.

³⁸ Genesis 2:22.

³⁹ Genesis 3:1.

⁴⁰ Trombley, *Who Said?*, 100. See also Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, 94.

⁴¹ Genesis 3:9-11.

⁴² Genesis 3:15.

⁴³ See 1 Timothy 2:3-6, Genesis 3:15, Galatians 4:4.

⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 1:15.

⁴⁵ 1 Timothy 2:2.

⁴⁶ 1 Timothy 2:15b.

⁴⁷ 1 Timothy 1:5.

Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 7

First Corinthians 7, 11, and 14

Development Associates International

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA
Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668
Web: www.daintl.org
E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 7: First Corinthians 7, 11, and 14

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Readings:

Why Not Women? By Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton
Chapter 12: The Question of Headship

Further Readings:

Textbook: *God's Women Then and Now*, Deborah M. Gill, Barbara Cavaness,
Chapter 9 The Situation in Corinth

Learning Outcomes:

- Explore the New Testament practice of corporate worship
- Explore the issue of mutuality in decision making marriage 1 Corinthians 7:1-5
- Consider the figurative use of "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3-16
- Examine the kind of silence Paul required of women in 14:16-40
- Apply principles identified to your own situations

Introduction

In the last unit, we saw that the Church grew as the Holy Spirit was given to anyone who believed in Jesus, regardless of gender, race or class. We also saw that everyone who believed in Jesus had a significant part to play in the life of its fellowship based on the anointing and gifts granted by the same Spirit. We then met some of the women leaders and teachers who worked with Paul. And finally we considered Paul's instructions in First Timothy and suggested he was speaking into a specific situation in his effort to stop the passing on of false teaching.

In this unit, we will look at two other "difficult passages" concerning women. These are in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. As we will see the Corinthian church was still quite immature and in need of much input. These passages are in the context of Paul's ongoing communication with them. As always we will need to do our best to step into their situation to understand what Paul says before we bring that understanding into our situation.

Case Study:

Dr. Aziz decided to drop in at the hospital one day to see Rebecca unexpectedly because he had one more question about his wife Elizabeth's follow-up treatment. When he walked in at the front door he was quite surprised to find a large crowd of mothers and children gathered in the lobby. They were obviously from very poor families as some had only tattered garments and several of the children seemed tiny and malnourished.

Just as Dr. Aziz started to work his way to the reception desk to ask about how to find Rebecca he saw her out of the corner of his eye trying to get the attention of the mother's. "Please everyone, you must be QUIET!" he heard her scream. "Now, I'm serious, you really must get quiet NOW!" She seemed flushed and a bit frustrated, but mostly she was just trying to make herself heard. It did little good, however, as all the women continued to talk excitedly to their neighbors and the children's cries seemed to only get louder.

Rebecca saw Dr. Aziz just then and a little embarrassed smiled and waved to him when she saw his amused look. Picking her way through the crowd she tried to talk to him above the roar of the crowd. "I'm afraid this is all my fault," began Rebecca, but she quickly realized it would be impossible to talk there. Instead she took him by the arm and led him through a side door and into a small and thankfully quiet waiting room.

"My goodness child what is going on here," laughed Dr. Aziz, "I expected to see you rushing around caring for patients, but I never thought about you trying to settle a small riot like the one going on out there!"

Rebecca quickly explained that on Friday mornings she had begun a new program at the hospital where women from the near by slum area could come and have their babies weighed and monitored for free. The program had exploded in popularity, something no one foresaw, so that this morning, more than 100 women had arrived for the program that could at best accommodate about 20. Of course none of the women had ever been inside a hospital before. In addition many only spoke their local language so Rebecca's pleas in English were having no effect. None of them had any idea what they were to do, but they quickly seemed to grasp that only a few could be taken care of so they were all vying for those spots. Rebecca had been trying for nearly half an hour to bring order to the situation when Dr. Aziz walked in!

"Here my dear, let's go out there together and see if I can help you sort out the situation a bit. I speak at least two of the languages you don't and understand a third one, so maybe together we can help bring order. Besides, I think this will be a great practical example when we sit down together next week to talk about I Corinthians. You see I think in some ways this is similar to the situations Paul sometimes found himself in there trying to help conduct church!"

Answer Box # 1

Do you know anything about the historical and cultural context of I Corinthians? Do you have any idea what Dr. Aziz might have been referring to?

Lecturette:

1 Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:26-40 are passages often quoted when talking about the role of women in the home and church. However they are sometimes used in ways that distort their meaning as Paul intended. As we continue our study, keep in mind the principles of interpretation and application. We must ask ourselves “why is Paul writing this”. What is the question he is answering?” As we read with these questions in mind we will discover that Paul wrote to address very specific issues faced by the Corinthians. These verses were in the context of a back and forth dialogue. For this reason we have to work to put these verses into the bigger context of his interactions with the Corinthians.

In the literary context of 1 Corinthians we find a passage where Paul gives an example of how husbands and wives are to make decisions. As we have just said, 1 Corinthians was written by Paul in response to specific questions the Corinthians asked him.

1 Corinthians 7:1-5

1 Cor 7:1-5 is Paul’s response to their question having to do with sexual relations between a husband and wife.

Answer Box # 2

Please read 1 Cor 7:1-5

What might you conclude from this passage about who has the authority in the marriage, the husband or the wife? Is this an example of hierarchy where the husband is over the wife (complimentarian view) or is it an example of mutuality where the husband and wife share responsibility in the decision making (egalitarian view).

Given what we already noted about the cultural view of women, what about this passage is surprising?

Who has the authority to decide when and how to have sex? BOTH! In his answer, Paul reveals that both the husband and the wife have an equal voice in decision making regarding their sexual relations. This is an example of what mutuality looks like in a marriage. Paul instructs them “the wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent for a time” The husband and the wife ONLY have authority over themselves. Each has the right and responsibility to decide to yield himself or herself to meet the need of the other. The husband is not her authority. He does not have the right to make decisions for her.

This model of mutuality is new to mankind since the Garden of Eden! Certainly it was new to the world of Paul’s day. So where does Paul get such a model for how a marriage should work? How does he know this is the way it is suppose to be? Well of course Paul was taught by the Holy Spirit. And it is clear from his writings that Paul understands both the marriage relationship and the relationships in the Body of Christ are in some way a reflection of the relationships within the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sometimes when I am teaching this someone will ask me “You mean “I do not have to submit to my husband”? Well, NO. I do not mean that. A WIFE MUST SUBMIT TO HER HUSBAND. However, the HUSBAND MUST ALSO SUBMIT TO HIS WIFE.

This is not about liberating women to do their own thing, or to be dominant, controlling or manipulative in their marriage. This is about a husband and wife who relate in ways that reflect the beauty of the mutuality in the Trinity.

Families and churches that reflect the Trinity in this way are a powerful witness to the life of Christ within them. Paul applied the prayer of Jesus to both marriages and church fellowships. He understood when marriages and local congregations function in mutual love and respect as the Trinity then the world will know they are followers of Jesus. (John 17)

Mutuality in the Trinity parallels mutuality in the marriage. This is Paul’s model for husbands and wives. And here in 1 Cor 7:1-5 he gets very practical and shows them what mutual respect looks like in a marriage.

Keep these words of Paul in mind as you consider what Paul says about men and women later in this letter. Remember he can not mean something that would contradict what he has just said to them a few verses before.

Now we will look at the historical/cultural and literary context of 1 Corinthians.

Historical/Cultural Background

The church in Corinth was most certainly made up of a mixture of cultures. Greeks and Jews probably dominated, but most certainly given the location and economic power of the city every ethnic group of the Mediterranean was represented. So it was a real mix of pagan cultures.

Corinth had a terrible reputation for both opulence and debauchery. There was actually a word in Greek, *korinthiazesthai* (to live like a Corinthian—coined by Aristophanes) which meant in immorality and drunkenness. While the upright women of Greece were secluded, the temple prostitutes and other loose women were free to ply their trade. It was noted that one temple had more than one thousand prostitutes. Pagan festivals and celebrations were often characterized by wild music, frenzied dancing, drunkenness and sexual orgies. Riotous chaos would reign supreme for days at a time. This was the normal way to celebrate.

You can imagine the confusion when these folks became Christians directly from this life style and came to church.

Answer Box # 3

Can you think of an example of chaos or confusion or at least extreme discomfort that a new Christian caused in your church do to lack of understanding of what is appropriate behavior. How was the situation addressed?

You can see it is not always easy for new converts to participate in the church in ways that are helpful. Paul wanted everyone to participate, even the new converts, but not in a disorderly way. The letters to the Corinthians are part of an ongoing dialogue, over a period of five or six years. This dialogue was by letters being sent back and forth and by delegations coming to Ephesus to ask Paul directly, all the effort of ongoing discipleship of the Corinthians.

Literary Context

Literary context includes the verses before and after the ones in question. A study of the whole letter of Corinthians shows both of the verses in question are in a section concerning the same theme, which David Hamilton points out in our suggested reading is the corporate life of the Corinthian church. The following is his outline of this section:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| -- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 | gender issues in public ministry |
| -- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | instructions regarding the Lord's Supper |
| -- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | the diversity of God's gifts |
| -- 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a | unity in the Body of Christ |
| -- 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13 | love as the motive of ministry |
| -- 1 Corinthians 14:1-25 | the gifts of prophecy and tongues |
| -- 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 | how corporate worship should take place |

As we said earlier Paul's framework for understanding how the Body of Christ is to function is the model of how the Trinity functions. Just as the Trinity is made up of the three that are one, so the Body of Christ is made up of the many that are one. Just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit respect one another, defer to one another, and love one another, so believers are to relate to one another; every believer, regardless of race, gender or class. And just as each member of the Trinity makes a vital contribution in the work of God, so each member of the Body of Christ is to make a vital contribution in worship of God and service to the others. In this section Paul encourages **ALL** to participate in corporate worship in ways that strengthen each other. (1Cor 14:26) Only as the church serves and relates to one another in this way, do they reflect the character of God and extend His Kingdom to those around them. Their corporate life affects their witness and fruitfulness in the city.

However, this model of worship that Paul wants the church to aim for depends on the right motivations and self control of each individual in the corporate body. Given the cultural background of the Corinthians it is no wonder they had a lot to learn. Paul readily responded to their situation and questions.

Answer Box # 4

Read 11:2 through 14:40 in one sitting. Write a few paragraphs describing the general maturity level of the Corinthians and the quality or atmosphere of their corporate worship gatherings.

Paul only spent eighteen months in Corinth. He obviously did not have enough time to teach them all they needed to know, especially coming from their background.

The final point regarding context that needs to be made is the Corinthian church had experienced the leadership and teaching ministry of women that Paul esteemed highly such as Priscilla, Chloe and Phoebe. These are three of the women we talked about in our last unit. It is impossible for Paul to embrace the leadership and ministry of these women from Corinth and at the same time write words that seemingly imply all women, in every situation, in every culture are to be silent. IMPOSSIBLE!

So if that is not the meaning, then let us consider what is. Let's look at the first of the difficult passages:

1 Corinthians 11:3-16

Answer Box # 5

1 Cor 11:3-16 Read the passage and answer the following

- What observations and questions come to mind as you read through this passage?
- What seems to be the concern that he is addressing?
- What is his point to the Corinthians? What are they to understand and do?

The issue Paul is addressing is cultural and concerns head coverings worn by women in public worship. Notice he is **not** addressing a question about the role of husbands and wives. He is **not** talking about who has the authority in the home. He is **not** answering a question about the value of men verses women. He **IS** addressing a conflict that has to do with the culture!

Cultural issues are those that offend or shame others by what is or is not practiced. By their very nature something that is a problem in one culture may not be a problem in another culture.

Answer Box # 6

Identify a behavior that is offensive in your culture that might not be in another culture.

I have lived in Europe for 20 years and in many countries in Europe, Christians enjoy a glass of wine or beer. However, this practice would be highly offensive to Christians in other cultures. Is having a glass of wine wrong? Well, not exactly. Being drunk is. However, if a Christian drank a glass of wine in the presence of someone who is offended by it and that Christian continues that practice no matter what; that is a sin. He is willingly and selfishly offending someone.

This is the kind of situation Paul is speaking to. It appears women/wives are praying and prophesying in church without a head covering. Husbands are being dishonored by this. When conflict emerges due to cultural offenses the Biblical principle is for the one who is doing the offending **to choose to change** their behavior, even if what they are doing is not morally wrong in itself. The fact that it truly offends others is reason enough to let it go.

“So why” you ask “is this an important passage for us to understand in our study on women?” In making his case to encourage women to respect the cultural mores, Paul says some things about men and women that have become a point of disagreement by Christians today. But before we jump right into the issue let's continue to step into their world and see the verses from their perspective.

Let's continue to make observations or ask questions of the text.

- What is the meaning of the figurative word “head” in verse 3? *“Now I want you to realize that Christ is the head of every man, and man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ” Is Paul presenting a hierarchy of authority or chronology of origins?”*

Answer Box # 7

Let's substitute “authority” in place of “head”

Now I want you to realize

that the head (authority) of every man is Christ,
and the head (authority) of the woman is man,
and the head (authority) of Christ is God

Is Paul presenting a hierarchy of authority that decreases as you go from top to bottom? Identify where it does not seem to fit and explain why.

Let's substitute “source” or “origin” in place of “head”

Now I want you to realize

that the head (source/origin) of every man is Christ,
and the head (source/origin) of the woman is man,
and the head (source/origin) of Christ is God

Is Paul presenting a chronology of origins that began with the creation of Adam and end with the incarnation of Jesus? Identify where it does not seem to fit and explain why.

Paul is presenting a chronology of origins not a hierarchy of authority in verse 3. The word “head” at that time usually meant origin, as you will discover in our assigned readings. In addition, verse 11 clearly shows Paul has origin in mind. *“¹¹In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man of woman. ¹²For as woman came from man, so man comes through woman. But everything comes from God.”*

One reason why this passage is difficult to understand is the variety of ways Paul uses the word “head”. He uses it figuratively 5 times and literally 8 times. We have just

looked at the first figurative use of head is in vs3. Now let's take a closer look at the word "head" in verse 4 and 5. Notice Paul uses the word "head" both literally and figuratively in these verses. The meaning for the figurative use of "head" in each verse is taken from the way Paul defines it in verse 3.

For Example in verse 4 Paul says "if a man prays...with his head (literal) covered he dishonors his "head" (figurative). We know from verse 3 the "head" of man is Christ.

Likewise in verse 5 Paul says "Every woman who prays ...with her head (literal) uncovered dishonors her head (figurative) which we know is her husband from verse 3.

Again in some circles today Christians use this verse to support the idea Paul is making sure the wife understands her husband has the authority in any decision making process in the home, because he is "head of the wife". However Paul is not even talking about decision making in the home. He is talking about whether a woman should cover her head. He does not tell the women obey your husband because he is your head. He says because he is your "head" (you are a reflection on him) you are shaming him in public by your choices. Notice again the only one making a decision is the woman and in that decision Paul says she has the authority to decide for herself what she wears on her head!

In addition if he was presenting some kind of hierarchy of husband above wife then he would be contradicting the mutual decision making process he outlined in 1 Cor 7:1-5.

How do we apply this part today? Do women/wives have to cover their heads in church in every culture at any time? NO. Head coverings are a cultural matter. If a woman is in culture where women do not normally cover their head then they do NOT need to cover their head in church. Cultural rules can change and sometimes they need to changes to keep the Gospel relevant.

Other observations:

- Notice Paul does not challenge the fact that women pray and give prophecies. *"⁵and every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head,"* Women were actively using spiritual gifts in worship with both men and women present.
- What does Paul mean by *"⁷A manexists as God's image and glory, but the woman is man's glory. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹and man was not created for woman, but woman for man."* Paul can not possibly mean that only men are made in the image of God but women are NOT. Of course BOTH men and women are made in the image of God. Paul is simply saying a woman came from man; therefore she is a reflection of her husband and she can shame him in public by what she wears. Can a husband shame his wife in public? Well, YES, however, that is not the issue here. Notice: lest anyone get carried away with what he just said Paul balances his statement with verse 11 *"¹¹In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man of woman. ¹²For as woman came from man, so man comes through woman. But everything comes from God."*
- Finally notice Paul continues in verse 10 to say the woman has the authority over her own head. That is she can decide what to wear on her head herself. *"¹⁰This is why a woman should have authority over her own head: because of the angels."*

Our reading assignment will explore these things in more detail. Please be sure to continue to make observations and ask questions of the text as you consider the input in the reading material.

In summary, Paul is making the point women (Eve) came from men (Adam) so a wife's behavior is a reflection of her husband; that is a wife can shame her husband in public, and in this case she is doing it by praying/prophesying without covering her head. His point is to cause the women to think about how their behavior is affecting their husbands. Paul leaves the decision up to the women to decide if they will cover their heads or not.

Answer Box # 8

Identify the principle in this passage and illustrate how it might be applied today. How has your view of this passage changed in light of this study? What difference will it make in your attitudes and actions related to women and men?

One principle: In matters of culture be aware of how your actions affect others and change your actions if necessary, including husbands and wives.

This was brought home to me when traveling once in India where many churches teach that women must literally cover their heads when praying or speaking. One of my Indian friends told me that she took two non-Christian young urban women with her to church because they had expressed an interest in knowing more about Jesus. When they observed this practice of women covering their heads, they were so offended at how outdated and foolish the idea was that they decided that Christianity was probably just as irrelevant to their world and never returned to the church. How sad that we can make a cultural practice so important in our worship services that it drives young people away from knowing Jesus.

1 Corinthians 14: 26-40

In 1 Corinthians 14: 26-40 Paul is addressing proper behavior in corporate worship.

Answer Box # 9

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 Read the passage and answer the following

- What seems to be the issues that Paul is addressing
- What is his point to the Corinthians? What are they to understand and do?

The issue concerns order in the worship service. Paul addresses things that presumably have contributed to disorder. What are the three situations of concern?

1. Speaking in tongues with out interpretation
2. Speaking out of prophecies, revelations etc. in a disorderly way
3. Women speaking in some disruptive way

Notice, Paul calls for quiet three times. He uses the same phrase in the Greek all three times in verses 28, 30 and 34. This is not apparent in most translations because

translators decided to translate them differently. In doing so they decided to make the phrase related to women sound the most restrictive.

Deborah Gill and Barbara Cavaness in their book, "God's Women Then and Now" give this helpful grid (pg 127)

Verse 28 Tongue speakers	must be silent if	there is no interpretation present
Verse 30 prophets	must be silent if	if another prophet has a revelation
Verse 34 women	must be silent if	?????

Regarding the silence of women in church

What is the nature of the silence Paul is calling for? We already saw in Chapter 11 that Paul does not challenge the fact women are praying and prophesying. This supports the idea that Paul approves of the participation of women. Given this, Paul cannot mean in verse 34 women are to be completely silent in church in all circumstances at all times. He would be giving contradictory commands. There must be a certain kind of situation in which women are talking that he wants to stop. The text itself gives us a clue. Can you find it?

Answer Box # 10

What is the clue: What is the situation in which the wives are being disruptive?

Clearly Paul is addressing the behavior of some wives who are interrupting the service by asking their husbands questions. The clue is where Paul clearly says "ask them at home" verse 35. But why does Paul say women are to be in "submission as the Law says" (verse 34)? Surely he is painting a picture of silent submissive women who are seen and not heard! Well, No he is not. He is painting a picture of women who are using their God given ability of self control.

Ok so what does he mean by women should be in submission as the Law says? First of all the Old Testament Law does not say anything about women being in submission so what could Paul be referring to? What kind of submission and to whom? The context implies women are to be in submission to themselves; that is they are to have self control. This principle of self control is in Old Testament Law. That is the Old Testament Law expects both men and women to have self control. Just as Paul asks the prophets to control themselves (verse 32) he is asking wives to control themselves and wait to ask their husbands at home.

Answer Box # 11

- Describe what the Corinthians' corporate worship time should look like given Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14.
- Explain who and why Paul asked certain ones to be silent.
- Identify some principles from this passage and apply them to your situation.

Some principles from this passage would be

- everyone has the capacity and responsibility to make a contribution in corporate worship
- spiritual gifts are to serve the body
- timing and order are important in corporate worship
- disorder and needless interruptions are to be stopped

Conclusion

We have examined the two disputed passages regarding women's roles found in 1 Corinthians in light of the historical, cultural and literary context. We have seen the Corinthian church had experienced the leadership and teaching ministry of women that Paul esteemed highly such as Priscilla, Chloe and Phoebe. We also noted Paul affirmed the mutual decision making process of husbands and wives, the participation of all members of the Body of Christ in worship. Paul specifically acknowledged the activity of women praying and giving prophecy in worship.

We are suggesting the matters discussed in both of the disputed passages were cultural and specific to their situations. One being about what women should wear on their heads in worship and one about some wives interrupting the worship service by asking their husbands questions.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

We have seen that the model of the way the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate is a model for both the marriage and the Body of Christ. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in each person empowers the mutual honoring and respect of one another in marriage or in the church. For the final assignment, we would like you to write a letter in which you are discipling the people in one of the following scenarios.

Choose One:

- a man and women who are about to married. They are new Christians. They have asked you to help them understand what a Christian marriage is to look like. What is the role of the husband and wife?

OR

- a new church plant wants to know what the rules are for how they are to relate to one another when they gather as church . Who can talk? Who can use spiritual gifts? Who can lead? Who can preach? When? Why?

Readings

Why Not Women?

A Biblical Study of Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*

By Loren Cunningham and David J. Hamilton

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CHAPTER 12: THE QUESTION OF HEADSHIP (Part One of I Corinthians 11:2-16)

By David Hamilton

People who love Jesus want to be obedient to His call upon their lives. The hearts of both men and women who follow Jesus stir with the desire to use their God-given gifts and talents to see the kingdom of God extended and the Great Commission fulfilled. However, three statements of Paul's pose a problem for women who are committed to obeying the Word of God yet feel called to public ministry.

1. "The head of a woman is the man"¹
2. "Women should remain silent in the churches."²
3. "I do not permit a woman to teach."³

How can a woman read these passages and be both faithful to the Word of God and faithful to the gifts and callings God has given her?

We will look squarely at these passages in the next several chapters and answer the questions that they have raised. Many look at these passages, such as the one in 1 Corinthians 11, and wonder. It appears that Paul is contradicting the equality he has been promoting. What happened to the great egalitarian whom we saw moments ago, over-turning patriarchal societies, flying in the face of the second-class status given to women? Is he backing down, soft-pedaling, retreating from his previous statements? Is Paul contradicting himself? Does the Bible contradict itself?

GOD WELCOMES OUR QUESTIONS

Though some passages may at first appear contradictory, we can be sure that God does not contradict Himself. God is truthful, unchanging, the absolute source of all knowledge and wisdom. Not only that, but He reveals truth to us and invites us to question Him when we don't understand. God doesn't ask us to abandon our minds. The God of the Bible created our minds, and He will help us as we wrestle with things we find difficult to comprehend. He said that if we lack wisdom and we come to Him, He will give it.⁴ There are answers, and He will help us find them.

LOOK AT THE CONTEXT

We need to look at any troubling verse in its context to discern its true meaning. So let's back up and take a look at the big picture of this section of 1 Corinthians. Starting with 1

Corinthians 11:2, Paul addressed pressing concerns in the corporate life of the Corinthian church. In the following four chapters, he dealt with

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| -- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 | gender issues in public ministry |
| -- 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 | instructions regarding the Lord's Supper |
| -- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | the diversity of God's gifts |
| -- 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a | unity in the Body of Christ |
| -- 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13 | love as the motive of ministry |

- 1 Corinthians 14:1-25
- 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

the gifts of prophecy and tongues
how corporate worship should take place

LEADING WITH GENDER ISSUES

Paul began with gender issues because, evidently, it was one of the leading issues in Corinth. Earlier in this Epistle, he had given teaching that placed men and women as equals and showed each individual's value. Now Paul has turned to how men and women should relate in public ministry.

For this discussion in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul used a method of teaching common in the Bible called "interchange:" He alternated between two sets of ideas, different but related. Scholars call it the A-B-A-B structure. On one hand ("A"), Paul discussed right attitudes--bedrock principles that guide all behavior for all Christians everywhere. On the other hand ("B"), he showed the practical outworking of those attitudes in the right attire for their society, for first-century Corinth.

WHAT DID HE MEAN BY "HEAD"?

Read Paul's words carefully: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of a woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God."⁶ Was Paul contradicting the equality he had already promoted? Much hinges on our interpretation of the word *head*.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word *head*? Probably something like boss, leader, authority, ruler, top dog, the big cheese, or head honcho. Right? To be honest, it doesn't matter what you or I think. What matters is what Paul's original readers thought. What image did the word *head* bring to the mind of first-century Corinthians?

In Greek, the word is *kephale*. Like its English equivalent, it is used to refer to the part of our body that sits above our shoulders and is also used in several metaphorical meanings. When it comes to these various meanings, we enter a real battleground between Greek experts. Some of these word warriors believe it could mean "authority over;" as it does in English when we say "the *head of* a department." Others think this Greek word was primarily used to convey the idea of "source" or "origin"⁷ as it does in English when we speak of the *headwaters* of a river. On the one hand, Liddell and Scott list forty-eight English meanings for *kephale* in their dictionary, and not one of them means "leader," "authority," "first," or "supreme."⁸ On the other hand, Bauer's lexicon gives "superior rank" as one of its meanings.⁹ How could experts disagree over the meaning of a word?

"Waiter, Could You Please Bring Me a Diaper?"

Several reasons exist for disagreement between the experts. For one, any language is a living thing. Meanings for words change dramatically over time.

Sometimes this happens very quickly. Consider the word *gay* and what it meant to our grandparents versus what it means to us today. To our grandparents, *gay* meant "happy" or "carefree." It was first used to mean "homosexual" in the late 1960s. That happened in a few years, but scholars of ancient Greek are attempting to define words that evolved over many centuries. Imagine how hard to pinpoint the precise meaning for a word during a limited period of time, such as the few decades of Paul's ministry.

Added to that are the differences within a language as it is spoken in various parts of the world. Americans discover this when they visit England. A tourist in a restaurant might drop his "napkin" and ask the waiter for another, not realizing he has just asked the waiter to bring him a "diaper"! Such differences existed in Paul's day, too, as educated people from every part of the vast Roman Empire spoke the Greek language.

Ancient Clues

Where does that leave us? Can we discover what the word *kephale* meant to Paul when he said that man was the *kephale* of woman? We have several sources that will aid us. For one, we need to look at the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. This translation, called the Septuagint, would have been what Paul would have used when ministering among Greek-speaking people. This gets a little complicated, but it's worth our time to search carefully for the clues to solve this puzzle.

The word for "head" in Hebrew is *ro'sh*. As in English, *ro'sh* can mean part of the body, or it can mean "leader" or "ruler." When *ro'sh* meant a physical head in a passage of the Old Testament, the Septuagint translators chose *kephale* (the word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 11:3) to translate it 226 out of the 239 times, or about 95 percent of the time. However, when *ro'sh* clearly meant "ruler" or "leader;" the Septuagint translators used some other word 171 times out of 180. They used *kephale* for "ruler" or "leader" only 5 percent of the time.¹⁰

To put it simply, it is possible that Paul used *kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 to mean that man should be the "leader" or "ruler" over woman, but that would be a rare usage of the word, as seen by the evidence of the Septuagint. On the other hand, we find many, many times in ancient literature where *head/kephale* meant "source" or "origin." This came from the ancients' idea that semen, the source of life, was produced in the male brain, which is, of course, located in the *head*. Aristotle believed this and influenced generations after him.¹¹ Therefore, the head represented the source of life for them. Because of this, the Romans occasionally referred to sexual intercourse as "diminishing one's head."¹²

Likewise, *kephale* was the word used for the source of a river. This is why the Greeks and Romans often set up the bearded head of a man or a bull at a fountain or at the source of a river. This meaning was carried over into Latin and later into English, so that we still refer to the source of a river as its *headwaters*.

WHICH IS IT?

Back to our question for 1 Corinthians 11:3: If *kephale* could be either "ruler" or "life source," how was Paul using it here? If we were to substitute these meanings for *head/kephale* in the text, we could come up with two alternatives:

1. "Now I want you to realize that the *authority/leader* of every man is Christ, and the *authority/leader* of a woman is the man, and the *authority/leader* of Christ is God."
2. "Now I want you to realize that the *source/origin* of every man is Christ, and the *source/origin* of a woman is the man, and the *source/origin* of Christ is God."

Which meaning for *kephale* best fits the context of 1 Corinthians 11? Four things about this passage give us clues.

Clue #1: What's Missing?

If Paul was talking about man being the authority/leader over woman, if he was teaching that women should submit to men's "God-given" leadership, we could expect to see that theme woven throughout these verses. But when we look at the passage, two things are striking because of their absence:

1. The word *submission* is never used once in this passage.
2. *Authority*¹³ appears only once, and there it speaks of "the authority a woman has over her own head."¹⁴

What about the other meaning for *head/kephale* as "source/origin"? The idea of "origins" is found throughout the passage. First of all, the language of verse 7 is reminiscent of the Genesis account. Then, verses 8 and 9 talk about how the first woman originated from man. Next, verse 12 brings that idea full circle to say that since then every man has originated from a woman. Paul finally sums it all up by saying that everything originated from God. It is all about origins. Remember the A-B-A-B structure we said Paul used here? It fits perfectly. The first "A" is verse 3. After "B" (verses 4-7, where Paul discussed what to wear on their heads), verses 8-12 go back to "A" to further explain verse 3. It is precisely these

verses that address at length the subject of origins. So if you translate *kephale* as "source/origin," it's a perfect flow within the structure of the passage. But if you try to fit "authority/leader" into verse 3, it doesn't fit the rest of the passage.

Clue #2: Who Is "The Man"?

Look again at verse 3. See the first two pairs of relationship (every man/Christ, and a woman/the man)? The first pair is a universal statement--every *man ...Christ*. The second pair is specific, about a *woman... the man*¹⁵. Why does Paul shift from the universal to the specific? Who is this "woman." and who is "the man"?

If Paul is talking about "authority/leader" in verse 3, you get into some real difficulty here. *Which* man is the authority/leader over *which* woman? If Paul is talking about husbands being the authority over their wives, why does he switch from "every man" to the singular, specific "the man"? Or, since marriage isn't specifically mentioned, is Paul saying *any* man has authority over *any* woman? Or if this is about marriage, though not mentioned, where would this leave single women? What about widows? If a man has authority over any woman, does a mother need to submit to her son?

Some Messy Questions

If you translate *head/kephale* in verse 3 as "authority/leader," you inherit some very messy questions. Also, it seems inaccurate to say that Christ is presently the "authority/leader" of every man." Is this true? Is Jesus Christ presently the "authority/leader" of everyone on earth? Look around you. Read the headlines. Check out what's on TV. No, Jesus is not the "authority/leader" of every person, not yet. The Bible says that someday He will be. Someday, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.¹⁷ But it's not that way right now.

On the other hand, if we look at 1 Corinthians 11:3 with *head/kephale* meaning "source/origin," everything falls into place in the entire passage. Jesus is the "source/origin" of everyone and everything, even though not everyone yet acknowledges Him as his or her "authority/leader."

Paul told the pagan philosophers in Athens that Jesus "gives all men life and breath and everything else.... For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"¹⁸ Jesus *is* the "source/origin" of life for "every man." In fact, Paul established this point earlier in the Corinthian letter, declaring, "[Y]et for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."¹⁹

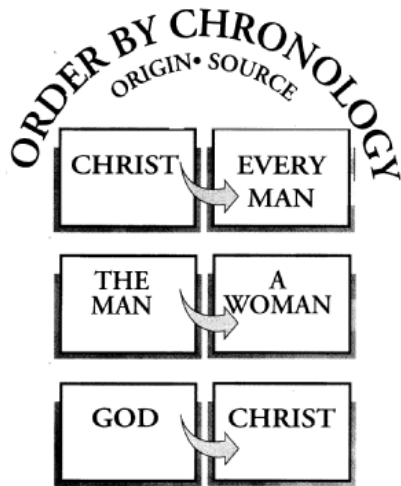
Translating *head/kephale* as "origin/source" also answers the question, Who is "the man" in 1 Corinthians 11:3? Paul started by saying that Christ was the origin/source of every man, then went on to say "the man" was the origin/source of woman. Who else could that man be but Adam? Adam was the origin/source for Eve. Once again, Paul was denying the teaching of Greek philosophers, who claimed that women had a separate and inferior origin. No, Paul said, woman came from man, making her fully human and fully equal to man. This also fits the A-B-A-B structure, for when Paul explains in verses 8 and 9 what he meant in verse 3, he refers to Adam when he wrote, "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."



Clue #3: A Question of Who Came First

Another indication of what Paul meant can be found in the order in which he listed the three pairs: "every man/Christ," "a woman/the Man," and "Christ/God." If Paul were giving us a divinely established hierarchy, we'd expect him to begin at the top and work his way down. The usual way to present a chain of command would look like this:

However, Paul did *not* list the pairs in a normal flowchart. Instead he began with "every man/Christ," then, "a woman/the man," and finally, "Christ/God." If Paul meant *head/kephale* to be "authority/ leader," he was arranging this supposed hierarchy in a strange order, starting with the second pair, then moving to the third, and then jumping back to the first pair.²⁰ Paul was a very orderly writer. His linear logic was always precise and clear, line upon line and precept upon precept. This haphazard listing would be very odd unless he had something entirely different in mind.



If you read "origin/source" instead of "authority/leader" for *kephale*, Paul's list in 1 Corinthians 11:3 makes perfect sense.²¹ In the order of creation, Adam was created first, from whom "every man" descended. Then God created Eve, "a woman" from "the man." Finally, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."²²

Of course, the only begotten Son existed throughout eternity with the Father.²³ In space and time, however, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us"²⁴

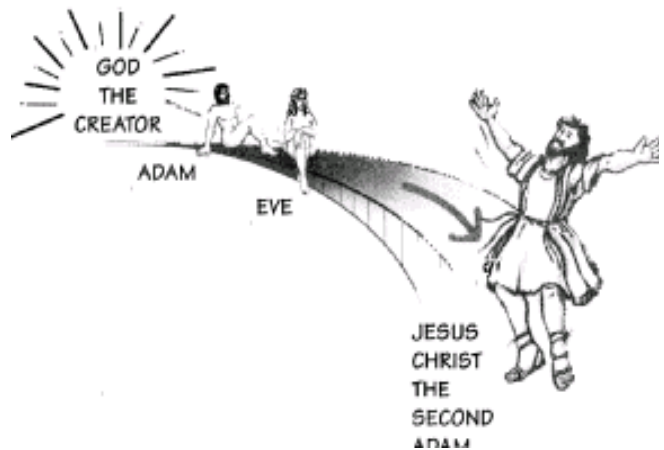
many generations after the creation of Adam and Eve, thus following them chronologically. Paul returned to this chronology again in 1 Corinthians 15:47 when he compared Adam—"the first man"—with Christ—"the second man." So Paul didn't give a hierarchy or flowchart in 1 Corinthians 11:3. He gave a clear timeline.

It Doesn't Fit

By now we see that it's highly unlikely that Paul meant to convey that man was "authority/leader" over woman. It simply doesn't fit. However, if he meant "source/origin," there's a harmonious flow to his argument.

The church fathers agreed with this interpretation. Cyril of Alexandria in the fifth century A.D. said, "Thus we say that the *kephale* of every man is Christ, because he was made through Him and brought forward to birth....And the *kephale* of woman is man, because she was taken from his flesh and has him as her source. Likewise, the *kephale* of Christ is God, because He is from Him according to nature."²⁵

It's important to see that the only other time Christ was spoken of as "head" in context of gender issues was in Paul's Ephesian household code.²⁶ Paul said in Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior." If authority had been on Paul's mind, you'd expect him to conclude with the phrase, "of which he is the Lord," but he didn't. Instead, he chose the far less usual



"Savior" over the more usual "Lord"²⁷ in this passage. By not using "Lord," he deliberately steered away from the concept of authority when speaking of Jesus as head of the church. Instead, Paul portrayed Him as "Savior," the one who redeemed us from death and is the *source* of new life. Once again, when Paul discussed gender issues he showed the concept of *head/kephale* as "source/origin" of life.

Clue #4: Christ Is Equal to God the Father

The fourth reason we believe that *head/kephale* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 should be understood as "source/origin" rather than "authority/ leader" is based on the theological implications for the third pair in the series, Christ/God. We know that Jesus voluntarily yielded to His Father's will throughout His earthly ministry. But this doesn't mean that within the Trinity the Son is in some sort of permanent, one-sided submission to the Father. In fact, the mutual submission we're supposed to have in the Body of Christ²⁸ flows out of the mutual submission of members of the Trinity to one another.

In the Bible we see each member of the Trinity lovingly bestowing honor on the others. The Father always commends the Son²⁹ and works through the Spirit;³⁰ the Son always yields to the Father³¹ and promotes the Spirit,³² and the Spirit always points to the Son³³ and does what the Father says.³⁴ The Trinity is the ultimate model of servanthood, preferring one another in love and honor, always submitting to one another in perfect unity.

Distorting the Trinity

Whatever else it may mean, the phrase "the head of Christ is God" cannot mean that there is inequality between the Son and the Father. Jesus is "very God of very God," fully equal to the Father in every respect. There is no hierarchy within the Trinity. This is why Athanasius, the fourth-century church father, said regarding 1 Corinthians 11:3 that "'head' must be understood as 'source' rather than 'boss' lest one arrive at a faulty understanding of the Trinity."³⁵

We cannot say that Paul meant *kephale* as "authority/leader" without giving a distorted image of the Trinity. Nor can we divide the parallelism of Paul's sentence to say that he meant the word one way in one phrase and another entirely different way when speaking of man and woman in the same sentence. However, if we use "source/origin" to interpret *kephale*, 1 Corinthians 11:3 is a straightforward affirmation of the incarnation of Christ. The self-sacrificing love of the Trinity is made even clearer. It was sacrificial love that led the Father to allow His dearest Son to leave heaven, to be born on earth, and to give His life to redeem us.

Now recall Paul's use of the A-B-A-B interchange. We've been looking at the first "A": dealing with the right attitude (verse 3). Paul was a complex thinker. He expected his reader to hold on to what he had said in verse 3 when he picked up the subject later in verses 8-12. So, to make it easier to understand his train of thought, we're going to jump ahead to the second "A" section, dealing with more of his thoughts on right attitude.

WE NEED EACH OTHER

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought *to have authority over* her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.³⁶

Paul used the Genesis account of Creation to remind men and women of their shared origins. In 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, he emphasized that both men and women should live in interdependence. Paul didn't leave room for either sex to despise the other. Women can't be independent from men because woman was created from man.³⁷ But neither can men adopt an attitude of prideful disdain for women, since woman was created because of man's need for her.³⁸

Those who see in verse 8 a foundation for male-only leadership because the male was created first have, regrettably, completely missed the point. Do you recall our discussion in chapter 7?³⁹ You don't have to read many chapters in 1 Corinthians before you see that chronological sequence doesn't qualify anyone for ministry or a particular level of leadership. If it did, Paul, to whom Christ appeared "last of all," shouldn't have ministered as he did.⁴⁰

The point such readers miss is that Paul was reminding men in 1 Corinthians 11:9 that Adam stood in need of an *'ezer k^eneged*, a strong partner.⁴¹ God designed Eve for full partnership with Adam because Adam couldn't do the job without her help. In the same way, Paul showed male believers in Corinth their need for women to be ministering alongside them. Men couldn't accomplish the task alone, because God designed men and women to work together in interdependence.

WORDS NOT IN THE ORIGINAL

Because women are full and equal partners in ministry, Paul said, "For this reason ...the woman ought to have authority over her head."⁴² The NIV translation of this verse is unacceptable. It adds the phrase "sign of," which does not appear in the original Greek. The phrase translated "authority over" is *exousia epi*. This phrase occurs fifteen times in the New Testament,⁴³ and in every instance it is an active description of authority possessed by someone over someone else or over something. The word *exousia* means "the right, authority, freedom, and decision-making ability."⁴⁴

Paul was simply saying that women have the right to wear whatever they want to on their heads just as men do. Of course, in the context of the rest of Paul's words throughout 1 Corinthians, women *and* men must be guided by love. Right attitudes of heart will dictate what styles will best serve the purposes of the Gospel.

RELINQUISHING AND CHALLENGING

Rights are never ours to be grasped. We should hold our rights loosely, relinquishing them whenever necessary to extend the kingdom of God or to protect a weaker member of the Body of Christ. The overriding principle Paul gave in 1 Corinthians--equal rights for men and women, but surrendering personal rights whenever necessary--can be applied wherever we find ourselves in ministry.

You might find yourself ministering in a culture vastly different from first-century Corinth. If you were to go to Samoa, instead of worrying about covering or uncovering your head, you would need to sit quickly when an older person walks into the room. If you were to go to India or the Arab world, you'd use Paul's principles and avoid touching someone with your left hand.

PAUL ADDS SOME CURIOUS WORDS

Paul inserted a very curious phrase in this declaration of women's authority. He said, "For this reason, and *because of the angels*, the woman ought to have authority over her head."⁴⁵ If you look up this phrase "because of the angels" in a dozen commentaries, you will find a dozen different suggestions as to its meaning. This is because no one knows for sure why Paul used it. Some of the suggested interpretations are quite ridiculous; others are more reasonable. Because Paul mentioned angels three other places in this Epistle, these references can serve as clues in helping us try to understand this odd phrase. Even so, we lack sufficient information to make a definite affirmation of Paul's intent. Though we can't be sure, the following possibilities may get us thinking in the right direction.

Possibility 1

In 1 Corinthians 4:9 and 13:1, angels are mentioned alongside *anthropos*, the gender-inclusive word for human beings. It seems that in both verses Paul was summing up the totality of the moral beings in God's Creation, contrasting humans, who have gender distinctions, and angels, who seemingly do not.

This brings to mind Jesus' teaching. Jesus compared humans and angels when questioned by the Sadducees. He taught that after the Resurrection, we will not marry

because we will be "like the angels in heaven."⁴⁶ Either we will no longer have gender or our gender will be irrelevant. Perhaps Paul had Jesus' words in mind when he wrote the curious words in 1 Corinthians 11:10. Perhaps he was reminding the Corinthian believers that gender distinctions would not be important in eternity. For that reason, we should not make such a big deal about them now.

Possibility 2

The other passage where Paul referred to angels is 1 Corinthians 6:3, where he said, "Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!" Maybe this was what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians 11:10, for three verses later he commanded the Corinthians, "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?"⁴⁷ Perhaps Paul was simply saying, "You're going to judge angels someday. Surely you can make responsible choices now about what to wear on your head!"⁴⁸

AUTHORITY, NOT INDEPENDENCE

Whereas Paul said in verse 10 that women had *exousia* (the right, authority, freedom, decision-making ability) over their heads, he went on in verse 11 to remind both men and women that for them, all God-given rights and authority had to be exercised in cooperation, not in autonomous independence: "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman."⁴⁹ Keep in mind that "Paul was writing this in the context of discussing public worship. His words opposed the pagan practice of excluding women in worship and the synagogue practice of relegating women to a side chamber or a balcony as silent observers of the men at worship."⁵⁰ Exclusion based on gender was to be unheard of among the redeemed of Christ. Neither gender could rightly function without the other. Ministry was to be shared.

Rabbi Akiba wrote an interesting parallel to this in *Genesis Rabbah*, a Jewish text from the early second century A.D. Akiba said, "Neither man without woman nor woman without man, and neither without the *Shekinah*,"⁵¹ that is, the "glorious presence of God." When men and women minister together in interdependent partnership, the *Shekinah* glory of God is manifested.

Another important thing to notice is that in verse 11, when Paul said "in the Lord," he wasn't limiting equality between the sexes to church or worship. The idea of separating the sacred from the secular is not a biblical idea. Everything we do--throughout the week, in our homes, in the workplace, as well as in our places of worship--is "in the Lord."

Nor was Paul limiting this new equality of women to Christians. Believers were simply to be the first to live it out. Freedom from centuries of oppression was to begin with the house of God, then permeate society. Jesus inaugurated and Paul promoted a whole new order of equality in the world not known since Genesis 3. The aim was to restore God's original plan--the partnership for which He created men and women.

The change has begun. Not a change of violent revolution or one of angry demonstrations and bitterness between the sexes. God does not employ bombs to usher in His kingdom and bring about change. He uses leaven. Though unnoticed at first, the leaven eventually transforms the whole mass.⁵² So it is that these biblical principles regarding the shared partnership of the genders were designed to go beyond the issues of prayer and prophecy, beyond what we wear or don't wear on our heads, in order to leaven all of life.

In closing, Paul returned once again to our creation as human beings, restating how we depend upon one another: "For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything come from God."⁵³ Because we have interdependent origins, we shouldn't be squabbling, as the Corinthians were, over who is more important. Everything we have is a gift from God.⁵⁴ Men and women have been created by the same wise and loving God to minister together. We shouldn't be sniping at one another, despising one another, feeling superior, or excluding one another. There is no place for this in the family of God, according to Paul. In the Lord, the sex war is over.

ENDNOTES to Chapter 12:

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:3; NIV text modified by authors in order to accurately reflect the Greek articles.

² 1 Corinthians 14:34.

³ 1 Timothy 2:12.

⁴ James 1:5.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 NIV text modified by authors. The modifications are as follows: In verse 3, "a woman is the man" replaces "the woman is man." In verse 10, "a sign of" has been dropped and "on" has been replaced by "over." The reason for these modifications will be explained in this chapter.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:3; NIV text modified by authors.

⁷ Gretchen Gaebel-Hull, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (Tarrytown: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1991), 253.

⁸ Philip Barton Payne, "Response" in Mickelsen, *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 118.

⁹ Berkley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, "What Does *Kephale* Mean in the New Testament," in Mickelsen, *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 100.

¹⁰ Payne, "Response," 121-123.

¹¹ Refer to chapter 5 of this book. Note that "Alcmaeon of Croton, a new contemporary of Pythagoras, believed that the sperm came from the brain, while Aristotle (like his mentor, Plato) explained that the semen descended from the head through the spinal cord to the genitals and was then sent forth to produce new life." This quotation is from Catherine Clark Kroeger, "Appendix III: The Classical Concept of *Head* as 'Source'" in Jull, *Equal to Serve*, 270.

¹² Catherine Clark Kroeger, "Appendix III: The Classical Concept of *Head* as 'Source'" in Jull, *Equal to Serve*, 270. Kroeger cites a half-dozen occurrences of this usage among the ancients.

¹³ *Exousia*.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:10; the NIV incorrectly inserts the phrase "a sign of" into the text. The Greek does not contain such a phrase. This will be more fully discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁵ In the Greek it has the definite article *the* before man but not before woman. Whereas the NIV says, "The head over the woman is man," the Greek literally says, "The head over a woman is the man." This small but significant correction to the NIV text will greatly help us interpret this challenging passage.

¹⁶ The Greek verb is in the present active tense, which means that it is occurring now.

¹⁷ Philippians 2:10-11.

¹⁸ Acts 17:25, 28. The first quotation Paul cites is from Epimenedes' *Cretica*. The second quotation is found both in Aratus' *Phaenomena* and Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*. Interestingly, Zeus' headship is likewise associated with his supposed creative, life-giving power. The *Orphic Poems*--written in Zeus' honor--state, "Zeus is the head, Zeus the middle, from Zeus are all things made." Quoted in Kroeger, *Head as Source*, 89.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 8:6.

²⁰ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman's Place in Church and Family*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 138.

²¹ Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), 55.

²² Galatians 4:4-5.

²³ John 1:1.

²⁴ John 1:14.

²⁵ Cyril of Alexandria, *De Recte Fide ad Arcadium et Marinam*. Quoted in Kroeger, *Head as Source*, 277.

²⁶ See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, 128ff. In fact, Paul uses *kephale* only nine times outside of 1 Corinthians 11. Once (Romans 12:20) he uses it in a literal sense. In the other eight occurrences, Paul uses the word metaphorically (1 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 1:22, 4:15, 5:23a, 5:23b; Colossians 1:18, 2:10, 2:19).

²⁷ In all his writings, Paul uses *kurios* ("Lord") 282 times in reference to God/Jesus--this was his most usual way to refer to the divine. In contrast, he employs *soter* ("Savior") very selectively--only twelve times in his letters. He uses "Lord" an amazing twenty-three times for every one time he uses "Savior." Because his use of "Savior" is so rare, it makes its use all the more extraordinary here in Ephesians 5:23.

²⁸ Ephesians 5:18-22.

²⁹ See Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35; Philippians 2:9.

³⁰ See Luke 11:13, 24:49; John 3:34, 14:16, 14:26, 15:26; Acts 1:4-5.

³¹ See Matthew 26:39, 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 4:34, 5:19, 5:30, 6:38, 8:28.

³² See John 6:63, 7:37-39, 16:7, 20:22; Acts 1:8.

³³ See John 14:26, 15:26, 16:14-15.

³⁴ See John 14:26, 15:26, 16:13; Acts 1:4-5.

³⁵ Catherine Clark Kroeger, "An Illustration of the Greek Notion of 'Head' as 'Source,'" *Priscilla Papers*, 1.3 (August 1987), 5.

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:8-12; NIV text modified by authors. The phrase "a sign of" has been deleted and "on" has been replaced by "over" in verse 10 because these words do not appear in the Greek text. The addition of these words by the NIV and other translations distorts the Scriptures, making it appear that the woman is to be subject to authority rather than to exercise authority. "Sir William Ramsey in his *Cities of St. Paul* states in this connection: 'Most of the ancient and modern commentators say the "authority" which the woman wears on her head is the authority to which she is subject--a preposterous idea which a Greek scholar would laugh at anywhere except in the New Testament where (as they seem to think) Greek words may mean anything that the commentators choose.'" Pape, *God and Women*, 109.

³⁷ Genesis 2:22; see Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, 89ff.

³⁸ Genesis 2:18; see Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, 91ff.

³⁹ If prior means superior, then frogs are superior to men, since they were created on day 5, whereas man was created on day 6. See Genesis 1.

⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:3-11.

⁴¹ See chapter 7 in this book.

⁴² 1 Corinthians 11:10; NIV text modified by authors. The phrase "a sign of" has been deleted from verse 10 because it does not appear in the Greek text. See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix F.I.

⁴³ The fifteen verses that contain the Greek phrase *exousia epi* are Matthew 9:6, 28:18; Mark 2:10; Luke 5:24, 9:1, 10:19, 19:17; Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 11:10; Revelation 2:26, 6:8, 11:6, 13:7, 14:18, 16:9.

⁴⁴ See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix M. The definition of *exousia* as given by Thayer is "1) power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases; leave or permission; 2) physical and mental power; the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises; 3) the power of authority (influence) and of right; 4) the power of rule or government." John Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. (Milford: Mott Media, 1982), 225. Bauer, Gingrich, and Danker define *exousia* as "1) freedom of choice, right to act, decide, or dispose as one's property as one wishes; 2) ability to do something, capability, might, power; 3) authority, absolute power, warrant; 4) the power exercised by rulers or others in high position by virtue of their office: a) ruling power, official power; b) the domain in which the power is exercised; c) the bearers of the authority--i) human authorities, officials, government; ii) of rulers and functionaries of the spirit world." Bauer, Gingrich, and Danker, 1979, in *Logos @ Bible Software 2.0*.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:10; NIV text modified by authors. The phrase "a sign of" has been deleted from verse 10 because it does not appear in the Greek text. Also, "on" has been replaced by "over." See Hamilton, *I Commend to You Our Sister*, Appendix F 1. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Matthew 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:27-40.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:13. In two other verses, Paul commands the Corinthians to judge: 1 Corinthians 4:5 and 10:15.

⁴⁸ Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 42.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:11.

⁵⁰ Bristow, *What Paul Really Said*, 59.

⁵¹ Genesis Rabbah 8.9 and 22.2. Quoted in Madeleine Boucher, "Some Unexplored Parallels to I Cor. 11:11-12 and Gal. 3:28: The New Testament on the Role of Women," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 31.1 (January 1969), 52.

⁵² Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21.

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 11:12.

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:7.

Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 8

Ephesians 5

Development Associates International

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D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 8: Ephesians 5

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Readings:

The Cultural Context of Ephesians 5:18–6:9. Is there a divinely ordained hierarchy in the life of the church and home that is based on gender alone? By Dr. GORDON D. FEE

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- State the historical and cultural setting of Ephesians 5:15-6:9
- Articulate several implications of the fact that that the occasion for the Ephesian letter to be written was the return of a runaway slave
- Interpret Paul’s words to husbands and wives in light of this setting and then apply them today

Introduction

In early units we have considered the impact the gospel had on social relationships in the first decades of the church. Jews and gentiles, men and women, slave and free were born by the Spirit into the same fellowship. Each one called, gifted and anointed by the Spirit for leadership and ministry. In this unit we want to consider the impact the gospel had on those within a New Testament household, especially on the relationship between a husband and a wife.

Lecturette:

In this unit we will look more closely at the change the gospel brought to roles in society and in the home, particularly between a husband and a wife. We will particularly look at Paul’s instructions to the Ephesians in 5:15-6:9. This passage contains instructions for the marriage relationship, parents and children and relationships in the market place (masters and slaves). Again it is imperative to look at this passage in its historical and literary context. We will see these relationships are intimately connected to one another in Paul’s day.

This time we will give you the chance to study the context before we offer too much information. This will give you further opportunity to practice the principles of interpreting and applying the Scriptures. As you study, try to step into the shoes of Paul and those who first received the letter.

Answer Box # 1

Read through the following passages and answer the questions.

Eph 4:1; 5:19-20, 6:21-22

Col 4:2-18

Philemon 1:1-3, 10, 13

Where is Paul?

Who is with Paul?

Who is Tychicus?

Who is the connection between the letters of Philemon, Ephesians and Colossians?

What is the connection between Philemon (the person) and the Colossian Church?

Historical and Literary Context of Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul while in his first Roman imprisonment. Most likely this letter was written to a wider circle of churches in western Turkey, which would include the Ephesians but also the Colossians and others. Paul also wrote the letter to the Colossians and Philemon at this same time. Ephesians is a longer letter than Colossians. While they cover the same topics, Ephesians contains an expanded version of Paul’s thinking. This is true of our passage regarding husband and wives. Therefore we will study the passage in Ephesians but we need to consider the context of all three letters.

Who connects all three letters together?

Col 4:7-9

⁷**Tychicus** will tell you everything that has happened to me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I am sending him

to you for this very reason, so that you may know how we are doing and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹**He is coming with Onesimus**, that faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

Eph 6:21-22

²¹*So that you may know what has happened to me and how I am doing, **Tychicus**, our dear brother and a faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. ²²I am sending him to you for this very reason, so that you may know how we are doing and that he may encourage your hearts.*

The person who connects all three letters together is Tychicus, who delivered all three while accompanied by Onesimus. We will discover Onesimus is a key person. The reason Paul even includes instructions for family and work relationships in Ephesians 5:22-6.9 has to do with his situation. Therefore In order to understand what Paul means in Ephesians we need to understand who Philemon and Onesimus are. So let’s find out more about them by reading the whole letter to Philemon.

Answer Box # 2

Read Philemon and answer the following questions:

Who is Philemon?

What is his connection to Paul?

Who is Onesimus?

Why is he important to Paul?

What does Paul want from Philemon?

Onesimus is a runaway slave from Colossae, who Paul met in Rome. Philemon is his master. Apparently Paul led Philemon to the Lord years before Paul worked in Ephesus. Somehow Paul recently met Onesimus in Rome and led him to the Lord as well.

What to do with a runaway slave, especially one who “belongs” to a church leader in another country! This was Paul’s dilemma. The cultural practice of slavery was not just. Surely Paul would be thinking this practice must be stopped. However, the question is how to bring about this necessary change by God’s principles?

As any culture, Roman society had a “norm” for relationships. In New Testament times, wealthy men were dominant. They were the landowners, business men, masters of slaves and masters of their household. Philemon was such a man.

Dr. Fee in our reading for this unit explains the “household” of such men includes a complex community made up of extended family and a number of slaves who served in a variety of ways including in the business activities of the master. The grounds of such a “household” were made up of many separate living and working quarters with a large courtyard all of which is surrounded by walls with public street front shops to sell what the household produced.

The “norm” for these relationships was reinforced by written codes that are known as “household codes”. A typical household code would say: wives obey the husband, children obey the father and slaves obey the master (owner). Note the verb “obey” is the same for each set of relationships. Paul uses the structure of such a code in Ephesians and Colossians, only he redefines them with Kingdom principles.

This Roman household is very different from the nuclear family in western culture today with a husband, wife and children. In the household of Paul’s day he is addressing an extended family, similar in many ways to extended families in non western cultures today. However, Paul is addressing more than an extended family. You see in Paul’s day, the “household” was also the “business”. That is, it was a building block for their economy. Households were places of production which provided the rest of the community with a needed product or service. This household also had slaves.

The household that Paul is addressing is by its nature a VERY DIFFERENT household than most we have today. And the key person of that household is the master, who of course in the situation involving Onesimus is Philemon. The Roman household included many husbands and wives-some who were relatives to the master and some who were slaves of the master but all were under his dominant authority. The master of such a household would be considered part of the aristocracy or a minority of the population with most of the power and wealth.

In most modern church settings when Ephesians 5 is preached the focus of application is aimed to get wives to recognize and obey the authority of their husbands. The point to the husbands is to get them to take their rightful authority but to do so in a loving way so that it will be easier for their wife to obey them. The authority of the husband is never the question.

However, this is exactly the opposite of Paul’s intentions. Paul’s whole point is to challenge the authority of the husband (master) and to point out that NO ONE in any relationship can have dominant authority over the personhood of any other adult human being. Let’s read that again. **Paul’s whole point is to challenge the authority of the husband (master)** and to point out that NO ONE in any relationship can have dominant authority over the personhood of any other adult human being!!!

Make no mistake Paul’s focus in Eph 5:15 to 6:9 is on the “master” because his role was the one that needed to change the most in order to line up with Kingdom principles. Let’s continue to stay in their world and build our understanding of the context.

Dr. Fee says that usually when such a master becomes a Christian, his household does too, and thus his household becomes an expression of a local church. Philemon is such a master and the church that meets in his household. (Phil 1: 1-3)

Almost overnight the household has a new identity and is to relate by a new set of principles that govern how brothers and sisters in Christ are to operate. Eventually Christians understood every person Christian or not was made in the image of God therefore they were to be treated with dignity and respect. No one was to be “owned” or “controlled” by another person’s will. God gave every person the capacity and responsibility to make their own decisions. This Biblical thinking was to shape relationships in community of believers and throughout society. However, change, which brought existing relationships into alignment with Kingdom principles, took time and discipleship. As you might imagine some of those in economic and political power resisted this change.

Dr. Keener makes the point that because the aristocracy in Rome resisted any movement that threatened their position, Paul disciplined the church to bring about this change in a way that would minimize confusion or misunderstanding. For one thing, Paul wanted to reach the aristocracy with the Gospel. He did not want them to simply write the Christians off as just another foreign religion that threatened their culture. In addition, Paul did not want to bring unnecessary persecution on the church. Therefore his strategy was to bring about the needed change one relationship at a time as those already in power chose to use their power to change the systems.

This situation with Philemon and Onesimus illustrates this. Paul urged Onesimus to be respectful of his master and the law and ask him to return to Philemon with Tychicus. In his personal letter to Philemon as well as in his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians (the church which met in Philemon’s household), Paul aimed to disciple Philemon (and the church) to rise to a higher standard, and treat Onesimus as a brother by setting him free to return to work alongside of Paul in Rome.

How do we know Colossians is the church that meets in Philemon’s home? Well Paul says that Onesimus is one of the Colossians (Col 4:9). And we know from the letter to Philemon that Onesimus is a slave of Philemon’s and that Philemon has a church that meets in his household.

Addressing cultural issues that require fundamental changes in the way people live and work must be done with wisdom. Paul demonstrated how to do this in the way he addresses slavery. He does not simply say “set all the slaves free because slavery is wrong”. This would have created chaos at every level in society. People would find themselves without a place to live or work. Children would suffer. And production of needed goods and services would stop, depriving the whole population. As a general rule this is not the best way to bring about change.

Answer Box # 3

To help us better understand the complexity of the situation Paul faced lets work with a modern day issue. How would you respond in the following situation?

A man has 5 wives and each wife has born him children. They all become Christians. They live in a culture where women can not live on their own nor bring up children alone. So the women and children are dependent on him for their shelter and food.

- *What would you tell this husband and father to do in this situation?*
- *What would you tell the wives to do?*
- *What would need to happen in order for the culture to change so that it becomes the norm for every man to have only one wife?*
- *What would be the best way to bring about change?*

This is a real discipling situation that occurred in the ministry in which I work. The husband became a Christian with all his wives. And in their culture there was no other way for the women and children to survive if the husband did not continue to care for them. It would be morally wrong for him to choose his favorite wife and send the others away. However, while we worked to ensure every person in that family network was treated with dignity and respect, we also worked to disciple the church that God’s way for marriage was one man and one woman.

As we see from this modern day example, changing aspects of culture that are fundamental to the way people live and relate takes time and wisdom

Literary Context Eph 5:21-33

We have already seen in Paul’s day social roles were defined in a written code called a “household code” and enforced by those in power. The household codes were a three part structure which required the obedience of all three (wives, children and slaves) to the master. The literary context of Eph 5:21-6-9 is in the format of this code. We must study these verses in this broader context of wives, children and slaves.

Answer Box # 4

Read Eph 5:15 to 6:9 and identify the three part format

In order to understand what Paul is saying to his original readers let’s put ourselves in Philemon’s shoes. Philemon knows what society expects of him as a master in this situation. He has not been disciplined to understand that God would have him respond differently. From his point of view, one of his slaves has broken the law. And he might ask himself: What is my obligation? Should I punish Onesimus? If I do not punish him, would that encourage other slaves to runaway? And if all the slaves ran away where would they live? How would they eat? Who would do the work? Perhaps the economy would collapse!

Now imagine being with the church the day Tychicus and Onesimus return. To you, and most everyone else, the identity of Onesimus is a runaway slave. You know the codes. You know they require the obedience of the slave. You know what happens to runaway slaves. So Onesimus returns. You discover he has become a Christian. You rejoice that he is now a brother. But what are the implications of that? Does that change the fact that he broke the law by running away? Who decides that? Well Philemon does. Therefore all eyes would be on Philemon to see what he will do.

Paul anticipates this situation. He knew he had to write to not only Philemon but also to the churches in the area from which he came to give them the Biblical principles that would bring about the right responses for the right reasons without creating chaos in their household or society. Wisely, Paul did not disciple people to completely disregard these social structures and thus alienate all those within them. Instead, he taught Christians to live and relate in such a way that these structures would be transformed in alignment with kingdom principles. Paul never encouraged the oppressed to be disrespectful, violent or even irresponsible as it related to their duties. Never the less, Paul aimed for those in power to willfully change the structures. This is exactly how he relates to Philemon regarding Onesimus.

In Paul’s letter he addresses not just the slave-master relationship but all relationships in the household, including that of the husband and wife. He redefines them all.

Before we continue our study in Ephesians to understand and apply principles related to the husband and wife relationship, let’s explore the present practice of roles for this relationship in your culture.

Answer Box # 5

What is the common understanding of the role of the husband in relation to his wife and children in your culture both in society in general and in the church (if it is different)?

What is the common understanding of the role of the wife in relation to her husband and children in your culture both in society in general and in the church (if it is different)?

How is the understanding of these roles passed on from one generation to the next?

Who has the authority to say what these roles are supposed to look like? In society? In the church?

What factors would you need to consider if you were to lead a group through fundamental changes in the way husbands and wives related to each other?

There is nothing more fundamental to our lives than the way we live and relate in our families. When change is needed it is important to encourage each person to maintain love and respect for each other, which is exactly what Paul does in his words in Ephesians. It is too easy for one’s heart to give into the temptation to become bitter, independent, unforgiving, stubborn, proud, fearful or more.

Let’s continue with our study in Ephesians to explore what Paul says and what he does NOT say to wives and husbands. What we will discover is that although the “household code” of the day assumes the context of an aristocratic male dominant society and simply starts with wives obey husbands, Paul starts with people in a fellowship of faith who are to continue to be filled with the Spirit resulting in mutually submitting to one another. The non Biblical cultural view is based on hierarchy and the Biblical view is based on mutual submission.

We will also see it is what Paul does NOT say that is most shocking! He simply leaves out the command for the wife to obey her husband. (This omission would be shouting at the original readers) Instead he tells them both to submit (respect) to one another. Notice too, how many words Paul addressed to the husband. This is the role that needed the most adjustment to align with Kingdom principles.

Paul does not miss the opportunity to disciple the men in power about women and slaves. He recognizes the Roman codes devalue both groups. He makes every effort to redefine these relationships in such a way that empowers both women and slaves and requires them to be treated with dignity and respect. His words would be shocking to the ears of the original hearers: challenging the attitudes of the aristocratic men in power and communicating dignity and respect to those under their dominance.

Given this background let’s read through Eph 5:15-6:9 together. We must start at verse 15 because this is the grammatical context of the household codes that begin with wives in verse 22. Verse 18 is the main clause that verse 22 modifies.

As we read through these verses please respond to the questions as they are identified.

*Eph 5:15-6:9 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, **be filled with the Spirit.** 19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

“*Be filled with the Spirit*” is the key phrase. Grammatically, it is the main clause that the participles in verses 19-21 modify. For example one demonstrates being filled with the Spirit by **speaking** to one another in psalms, by **singing**, by **giving** thanks, and by **submitting** one to another. (This is obvious in the Greek, but not so in English translations.)

Everyone is to be filled with the Spirit. **Everyone** is submitting to one another.

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Before Paul addresses specific relationships in a household, he first describes relationships within a fellowship of believers. Note he says Christians are to submit to “one another”. This is an interesting way to start a section on roles and responsibilities in a Roman society. Paul undermines any one person having **all** authority. This emphasis on mutual submission in the fellowship of believers is radical in a society with so much power distance between people.

Regarding instructions to “wives”: in the original Greek, the word “submit” (verse 22), is not there. However, it is clear Paul is referring back to the word “submit” in verse 21. That is Paul says “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, wives....to husbands. What

kind of submission is required of wives? The kind of submission that is to be applied as Christians relate to one another.

Now please take a minute to take that in. In a context where the audience expects to hear “wives obey your husbands” Paul says “submit (not obey) submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. Wives to your husbands” (By implication we can conclude he is also saying husbands submit to wives.) The audience would be SHOCKED.

Paul intentionally changes the code. He omits the concept of obedience in relation to wives and husbands and substitutes the idea of mutual submission. The word, submit that he uses in verses 21 and 24 is a different concept than the concept of obey in verse 6:1. In the Roman code it would have been the same.

Answer Box # 6

Please answer this question from the perspective of both a wife and then a husband who lives in a society built on the principle of male dominance and you were used to hearing “wives obey your husband” from a public platform:

If you were a wife...

If you were a husband....

- *How you would you apply Paul’s words in vs21 and 22? What might be some of your thoughts, feelings, reactions to these words?*
- *Identify some godly and ungodly ways you could respond.*

People who have been oppressed face great temptation when there oppression is lifted. Their responses can range from bitterness from the wasted years and the abuse to fearful of the new found freedom having grown comfortable under the dominance of someone else making all the decisions. On the other hand the oppressor faces temptation as well. He can remain stubborn and demand his right to rule. Or he may relinquish all his power and become a passive non player not knowing what “mutuality” requires of him.

So Paul knows he can not call for mutuality without giving instructions for what it looks like. Thus he continues to redefine the marriage relationship by comparing it to Christ and the church. Paul says “As the husband is head of the wife so Christ the head of the church” What does “head” mean? Remember from our assigned reading in the last unit we saw “head” rarely, if ever, meant authority in their day. Can you define “head” by the rest of the literary context (The verses that are before and after it)?

Notice Paul is using the metaphor of a human body. He says as Christ (head) relates to the Church (body) so the husband (head) is to relate to the wife (body).

What does Paul emphasize about this relationship?

Let’s look at the details Paul highlights. What does Paul emphasize about Christ? Is he emphasizing his Lordship which requires authority? What does Paul emphasize about the church? Is he identifying her need to obey or submit to Christ? NO! Please read it carefully

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church- 30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery-but I am

talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Paul paints a beautiful picture of Jesus loving and caring for the church that is a part of Him. And so the husband is to love and care for his wife as he cares for himself. THAT IS IT. That is Paul’s point. Now, it is true that Jesus is the Lord of the church and the church is required to obey Him, but that is not the point Paul is making here. Paul’s point to the husband is “your wife is as valuable as you are and you need to treat her the way you treat yourself.” Radical! And all of this is in the context where he has already said you are to mutually submit to each other, omitting the command that wives are to obey.

Wow. Imagine a master/husband like Philemon processing these words. He has to hear a challenge to his dominant authority. His marriage is not a hierarchy with him at the top and his wife obeying but a relationship where he and his wife stand side by side in mutual submission to each other.

6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"-which is the first commandment with a promise- 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Notice Paul asks children to obey mothers as well as fathers. Paul elevates the role of mothers to parent their children along side fathers.

5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7 Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8 because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. 9 And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Notice Paul does say “slaves obey your master” as the normal code would have said, but then he adds instructions to the master. Paul sows the seeds of social change by saying from God’s perspective there is no distinction between slave and free.

Answer Box # 7

How do Paul’s words to slaves 6:5-8 help them keep a godly perspective even as they are victims in the unjust system of slavery? How might these words apply to someone in your context who is in a similar system of injustice?

(Please note we are not talking about people in a situation in which they are being abused physically or psychologically. Paul would NOT instruct them to continue to stay in harm’s way. It would be the right thing to remove your self from such a situation while attempting to nurture forgiveness in your heart of the one who is abusing you.)

At this point in time the slaves can not change their situation over night. They can not just walk away from slavery. Given a situation like that, in which you can not change it, the best thing to do is to not let the situation define you or control your heart attitudes. That is: don’t let the situation poison your heart with pain. Do not accept the labels of “second class” or “not as good as” or “not as significant as”. Define yourself by truth. And the most fundamental truth is you are a human being made in the image of God and as such equally deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, even if the people around you are not. Someday they will have to give an account to God for their actions toward you.

And that is exactly what Paul says in this passage. Basically he says to slaves, you may still be in a situation where you are treated like a slave but do not take on that identity. Do not define yourself as one. Instead define yourself by your relationship to the Lord. The

way the Lord sees you, the way the Lord treats you, this is who you really are. So keep your heart pure and make the choice to serve Him, be faithful to Him.

You may be wondering, was Paul just passively giving into slavery? Was he simply accepting it as the way it was? No. It seems part of Paul's strategy to overthrow slavery was for the slaves to live as free men, choosing to work as God would have them work, even though they are still slaves, in hopes that masters, like Philemon, would get the revelation that slaves are people like themselves, who have the same rights and responsibilities to choose where to live, relate and work.

How might one apply Paul's words to someone in an unjust situation today? Well first it depends on the situation. Can the situation be changed? Who has the power to change it? What part does the person in question have? How much damage is the situation doing to a person emotionally, physically or spiritually?

These are only some of the questions that need to be considered. In the end the person in the injustice can only do her part. If she can change the situation, get help from some else or remove herself from the situation without violating other biblical principles, than she should do so.

Regardless, she is not to define her value or significance by the situation but by the truth. And as much as possible she should make every effort to treat her abuser(s) with dignity and respect, while working to guard her heart from the poison of bitterness.

In summary, the reason Paul refers to the household codes in Ephesians has to do with the occasion of the return of a runaway slave. People will respond to Onesimus based on these codes (or their culture) unless they are disciplined to respond otherwise.

Paul wisely does not disregard the codes. Instead he redefines them in the context of Christian fellowship created by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The social rules in this fellowship supersede all other social realities. Paul particularly wants Philemon to think about the implications of this as it relates to Onesimus. From a Roman cultural point of view, Philemon owned Onesimus and he has legal power to punish him. From a kingdom point of view, Onesimus was his brother who must be treated with dignity and respect. And the laws that enforced slavery were not Biblical.

When you read Paul's instructions to wives and husbands in the context of the culture of the original readers, you see how revolutionary Paul's words are. Husbands would have clearly heard the challenge to their dominant and authoritative role. And they would have caught the implications this would have in their household, and particularly with their wives.

Knowing the culture code they would have immediately recognized Paul purposely omitted the idea of authority (husband) and obedience (wife) and replaced it with mutual respect (mutual submission). They would have also heard the challenge that husbands can not simply demand their wives respect but they must win it through servant love. Make no mistake the women in the congregation would feel validated and liberated by his words! But liberated for what; certainly not to dominate or control their husbands. Certainly not to do what they want, when they want it, to serve herself alone! This is not what mutual submission looks like in the body of Christ or the marriage.

As we said in an earlier unit people need role models to learn how to live and relate with each other. Who are your role models for marriage? Where did you learn about the role of husband and wife? Is what you learned lining up with this model Paul gives in Ephesians 5:15-6:9? We would like you to consider this for your final assignment for this unit. But before we get to that we have left something hanging. What happened to Onesimus? Did Philemon set him free to return to Paul? Tradition says yes. And that Onesimus emerged to be the third Bishop of Ephesus.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

- *How has this study affected your perspective of what the Bible teaches on the role of a husband and wife in marriage?*
- *How has it affected the way you view marriage?*
- *How has it affected the way you relate to your spouse (if you have one).*
- *What impact do you think your church would have in the surrounding culture if the marriages in your church modeled “mutual submission” between a husband and wife.*

Readings

The Cultural Context of Ephesians 5:18–6:9

Is there a divinely ordained hierarchy in the life of the church and home that is based on gender alone?

By Dr. GORDON D. FEE

I begin this discourse with a disclaimer, since the title suggests far more than one can deliver in a limited amount of space. It suggests far more knowledge about this topic than I actually have—indeed, it is safe to say that there is much more that we don’t know about these things than we actually do. What I hope to do is to offer a few probings into the cultural background of this passage—which has become such a crux for people on both sides of the issue of whether there is a divinely ordained hierarchy in the life of the church and home, based on gender alone.

I. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

There are some preliminary matters that are important for our understanding of the passage itself.

1. Some assumptions about Ephesians itself and the role of this passage in this letter.

Contrary to what is probably the majority opinion in current New Testament scholarship, I think the Ephesian letter is by Paul. Furthermore, I think the letter has to be kept in its historical context as a companion letter with Colossians and Philemon.

The letter was probably not written specifically to the church in Ephesus—some early manuscripts lack a name in 1:1; in 1:15 Paul speaks about only having heard about their faith, and there are no personal words whatsoever. It may have been either the letter to Laodicea that ended up in Ephesus, or—more likely, in my opinion—this was a circular letter to the many churches in the province of Asia that sprang out of what he had to say to the Colossians.

What is important for our purposes is the letter’s clear association with Colossians and, therefore, with Philemon. One of the unfortunate things that happened in the organizing of the Christian canon was the separation of Philemon from Colossians, for both letters would have been read together in Philemon’s house church, with both Philemon and Onesimus present. The point, of course, is that the so-called house rules that occur only in Colossians and Ephesians almost certainly spring from the circumstances that brought Onesimus back to Philemon’s household and thus back to his house church.

All of this is to say that, in the Colossian expression of our text (3:18–4:1), you could substitute personal names for the generic terms there. Thus: “Apphia, submit to Philemon, as is fitting in the Lord. Philemon, love Apphia and do not be harsh with her. Onesimus, obey your earthly master, Philemon, in everything; and do it, not only when his eye is on you. . . . Philemon, provide your slaves [including Onesimus] with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”

I press this point because these house rules grow directly out of the situation that caused Paul to write these letters in the first place: the return of Onesimus to Philemon, and the strange doctrines that are being spread among the Colossian Christians as reported to him by Epaphras.

2. Some observations. Before turning our attention to some words about culture, I want to make a few further observations that are important for understanding this passage in the larger context of Ephesians.

Note first that verse 18 is the swing verse in a passage that begins in 5:1–2—key not only for walking as children of light (vv. 2–17), but also especially for everything that follows.

This is made certain by the fact that when Paul addresses husbands in verse 25, he deliberately echoes the language of verse 2:

“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (v. 2).

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it” (v. 25).

Moreover, you have probably heard at some point that Ephesians is full of long sentences. Indeed it is, and here is an especially long one: the sentence that begins in verse 18 does not end until verse 23. Now all English translations try to help the reader out of the morass by breaking this into smaller sentences; however, in so doing the modern reader can miss a lot.

a. In Greek the sentence has a single subject and verb, which comes in the form of an imperative: “You [the readers] be filled with the Spirit”; this is then followed by a string of modifying participles:

- speaking to each other in psalms, hymns, and so on;
- singing and hymning the Lord (Christ) from the heart ;
- thanking our God and Father always for all things through Jesus Christ;
- submitting to one another in the fear of Christ, followed by words to the wives with respect to their husbands.

b. The significance of this is twofold:

First, the words to wives and husbands are to be understood as totally dependent on their being filled with the Spirit. That is, all the words in 5:22–6:9 presuppose a household of believers who are continually being filled with the Spirit of God.

Second, and especially important for us: In Paul’s mind there is the closest kind of link between Christian worship and the Christian household. This is almost certainly because the former (worship) took place primarily in the latter (the household). The point is that most of the earliest churches met in households, and the various households themselves, therefore, served as the primary nuclei of the body of Christ (or God’s household) in any given location.

3. *A final, significant observation about the passage as a whole.* Notice that three relationships are assumed: wives and husbands,
children and parents,
slaves and masters.

But notice also that in each case the second party in the relationship is usually the same person: husband = father = master. This would not always be the case, of course, since the assumption of the passage is very decidedly that of the Roman villa; that is, the household of the elite, or privileged.

- The model thus has little to do with villas where women served as heads of households, in which case the first relationship does not pertain at all, and the second probably less so (although widows may well have had children in the household).
- So also in the case of “married” slaves within the household (a true marriage, even though not recognized by Roman law); the head” of the wife in this case was not her husband but the householder.
- Among the larger masses of people, moreover, very few of these relationships pertain at all or, as in the case of artisans like Priscilla and Aquila, there is a very clear sense of partnership in the marriage as in the business itself.

Here are two final observations about the passage in general that begin to move us toward some cultural matters themselves. Notice, first, that in terms of words used, Paul’s obvious greater concern in the first relationship is with the husband/householder. There are four times as many words to him as there are to the wife. In the other two relationships, however, the number of words goes in the opposite direction—two to one. This in itself suggests that the crucial matter for Paul is with what Christ has done to the first relationship.

Second, it is important to note that in each case the first person addressed is the vulnerable and powerless one in the relationship. In the case of wives and slaves, they are to rethink their status in terms of their serving Christ, as they relate to the male head of the household. And note, finally, that the male householder is not told to take his proper role as leader of the household—that was in fact the assumed cultural reality that could so easily be abused. Rather, he is told to model the character of Christ in his relationships to his wife and slaves.

What kind of a world is this into which Paul is speaking, as he leaves the structures intact, but radically alters the relationships in terms of living cruciform?

II. Altered relationships

1. *Culture in general: some assumptions.* This word *culture* is sometimes used in a way that suggests that there is an “oughtness” to culture. But that is an illusion. Culture simply is; it is not a matter of “should be.” Culture is what defines *us*; we do not define it, we simply try our best to *describe* it. Indeed, until recent times it was not even a subject of discussion, because it was simply assumed. But this is also our difficulty, because with regard to the first-century household, we must ferret out from a variety of legal and literary remains how people viewed the *familia*—which included the entire household, including slaves.

2. *The Greco-Roman world.* What we do know—and this has now been put into wonderfully convenient form by David deSilva in his recent book *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity* (InterVarsity, 2000)—is that three basic assumptions defined the cultural milieu of the Greco-Roman world: Honor/shame; patronage; and kinship. The concept of honor and shame ruled everything; honor, or its opposite, disgrace, was regularly the basis for most moral appeals. A common sense as to what was honorable or shameful was the fabric that held Greco-Roman culture together.

Patronage refers to the mutual relationship that existed between unequals, in which each was understood to benefit the other. This is the cultural reality that most Americans in particular find utterly distasteful. We get ahead on the strength of our own ingenuities. We get what we want or need by buying and selling, and those who get ahead by buying favors are scorned. But such a worldview was simply nonexistent in the time of Paul.

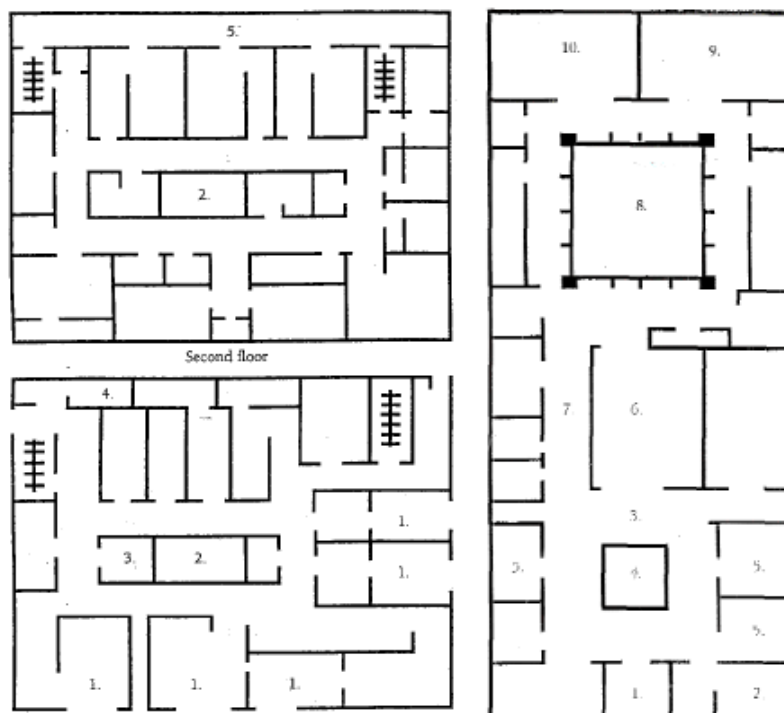
Indeed, the Greco-Roman worldview was quite the opposite: it was predicated on the reality of a world that was bottom-heavy; where the top few percent were the elite or privileged, and where the rest of humankind was rather totally dependent on being in good standing with a patron. Seneca, in fact, said that the giving and receiving of favors was the “practice that constitutes the chief bond of human society.” Such a worldview is especially in place when you read Philemon, where Philemon was both Paul’s patron and friend. Because he was Paul’s patron, Paul asks for the privilege of hospitality; but because he was a friend, he presumes upon the reciprocity of such friendship to intercede for the life of Onesimus (since, in another sense, Philemon owed his life to Paul).

Kinship comes out of patronage, in the sense that to survive people needed to be in some kind of relationship with others, especially within a “family.” But this is also one of the difficulties we face when we come to the “house rules” in Ephesians, because it assumes a privileged household, and by the time of Paul, especially in the larger cities (Rome, Ephesus, Corinth), the majority of people would not have been attached to a household, but they would have lived in the large *insulae* (apartments), or in their own form of slums, including street people.

That is the world, then, that is presupposed by our text. It is a world predicated on honor/shame, patronage, and kinship, a world so radically different from ours culturally that it is difficult for us even to imagine our way back into their setting. But what interests us here is how these cultural realities played out in the Greco-Roman household.

III. Greco-Roman households

Let us examine two drawings. *Figure 1* is a representation of the typical insula. Far more people lived this way than in the household assumed by Paul in this passage. This is a typical insula, based on the ruins of Ostia, the ancient seaport of Rome. Because its harbor silted up, the city was simply abandoned; and although most of its marble and other important movable materials were carted off over the centuries, the ruins are especially well preserved. This insula (an



apartment house in this case) would also most likely be the pattern for the home of artisans like Priscilla and Aquila, where the living and gathering of the church would be upstairs while the ground floor rooms that opened onto the street were shops. Such people usually did not have slaves, but rather servants or hired workers. And even though such households would often be the location of a “church that met in someone’s household,” this is not the basic pattern assumed in Ephesians 5—which, as noted above, is probably related to the fact that Paul has just been writing to Philemon of Colossae and to the church that meets in his house.

Such a household would look more like the drawing in *figure 2*. Here is the more typical domus, in which the privileged few—people like Philemon of Colossae or Stephanas and Gaius of Corinth—lived. This is clearly the kind of household presupposed by Paul in this passage. So we shall begin with the household itself, which assumes this kind of dwelling and which usually had a large number of people attached to it.

1. *The basic sociological model here is clearly that of patronage*; it was a mutual relationship between unequals in which each benefited the other. There are several aspects to this:

a. By law, the man, the *paterfamilia*, was the master of his household (thus the patron). Although he did not necessarily exercise it in a hurtful way, under Roman law his rule was absolute, in the sense that none of the others in the household had legal means to redress any grievances.

b. Usually, but not always, the *paterfamilia* required the household to serve his gods, since the gods were looked upon as responsible for “order,” for causing and maintaining things the way they are.

c. Such a household, unlike our understanding of home, was not a place of consumption, but of production. It was, therefore, again in sharp contrast to our culture, not thought of as a private haven (a refuge to return to after a day “out there”); rather, the Greco-Roman household was almost always semi-public (especially theatrum).

d. The householder and a few higher-level slaves had the only public roles. Here, for example, is the ideal about woman’s place found in Philo of Alexandria:

Market-places and council-halls and law-courts and gatherings and meetings where a large number of people are assembled, and open-air with full scope for discussion and action—all these are suitable to men both in war and

peace. The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood.

2. *What it meant for a woman to enter such a household as a wife.* We know from a large number of census lists from Egypt that:

- The average age of a man when he married was 30, and a woman’s age was less than 18; she thus entered his household as a teenager, whom he had also to educate in the ways of his household.
- The reason for marriage was not “love” in our usual sense, but to bear legitimate children, to keep the family line going; failure to bear children, especially sons, was often a cause for divorce.
- Most men, although not all, were promiscuous:
Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of the body, but wives to bear us legitimate children. (Demosthenes)
- Some wives, therefore, were promiscuous as well (although they always had to be more discreet, because their act would be considered infidelity, which was a matter of shame).

3. *In this kind of household, the idea that men and women might be equal partners in marriage simply did not exist.* Evidence for this can be seen in meals, which in all cultures serve as the great equalizer. In the Greek world, a woman scarcely ever joined her husband and his friends at meals; if she did, she did not recline at table (only the courtesans did that), but she sat on a bench at the end. And she was expected to leave after eating, when the conversation took a more public turn.

4. *Slaves, of course, did all the work*, both menial and clerical, including tutoring the children (they couldn’t have imagined a society without slaves). Slavery was not based on race, but initially on conquest in war, and eventually on economic need. Nonetheless, slaves had absolutely no rights before the law, evidenced by the fact that they could not even marry.

5. *Finally, we return to the matter of religion.* It is precisely because religion was regularly practiced in a household that, when such a householder became a follower of Christ, his *familia* would also as a matter of course follow Christ. Thus the *familia* (a Latin term for which we have no exact equivalent), which consisted both of blood relatives and all those attached to the household, both slave and freedperson, automatically became the nucleus/locus of the earliest Christian communities. And because there was already a semi-public aspect to the “home,” it also then became a place where many from outside the household would come and join in the worship—thereby creating a new kind of kinship, where Christ was now the new *paterfamilia*.

One final important note here. When such a householder became a follower of Christ, it was also invariably for him and his household a matter of shame—because he had chosen as his household religion to be a follower of a Jewish messianic figure who had died by crucifixion, which was one of the ultimate expressions of shame in that culture. What Paul does not do—indeed, it would never have occurred to him—is to add shame to shame by dismantling the *structure* of the household. That was simply in place. What he *did* do was in some ways far more radical: he applied the gospel to this context.

What interests us, returning to our text, is how a new kinship based on the household’s common relationship to Christ as “head” of his body, the new household of God, affected all of these various relationships.

IV. The household of God

As we move toward looking at the now-Christian household as God’s household, I want to point out some of the difficulties we have in reading this text, beginning with one of its more common abuses: using it to tell modern husbands that they should assume their

proper role as head of their wives. Since the modern household looks almost nothing like the Greco-Roman household, this issue must be given a new cultural setting. The modern application is almost always put in terms of: “When you reach an impasse in decision-making, who has the authority to make the final choice?”

I don’t know whether I hear Paul laughing or crying when that utterly modern reading is superimposed on this text—as though that were actually somehow derivable from the passage itself. And in any case, what would that look like for a couple of normally strong people like my wife, Maudine, and me, who are both second children, neither of whom likes to make decisions at all! In June we celebrated our forty-fifth anniversary, and I would say that we have never had such a decision-making stalemate in all these years. To be sure, we’ve had our moments—but never on this issue. Of course, we don’t get anything done, either!

But let me quickly add that it is especially difficult for *any* of *us* even to *imagine* our way back into that Greco-Roman culture, let alone to have any sense of feeling for it. Indeed, in our context I almost always have a strong sense of need here to apologize to the singles—which in itself is evidence of how different from them we really are culturally. So let’s say some things about ourselves and why we have such difficulty imagining that world.

We are heirs of a culture in which two major events in the past 300 years have radically altered Western culture forever, and which turned the basically patronal culture that preceded it completely on its head—namely, the so-called Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution.

The Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the individual, created a culture in which individual rights came to be regarded as the highest good. So much is this so that by the late twentieth century the concept of individual rights had finally almost totally superseded that of the common good. But the Enlightenment alone did not create the structural changes in our understanding of home and family. After all, look at the British manor house, with its “enlightened” autocrat, which has taken such a beating in a whole series of movies in the past decade.

No, it took the Industrial Revolution to really turn things on its head. It did so by turning both men and women outside the home into the marketplace. Just one statistic tells us how radically American culture changed during the past century. In 1885, it is estimated that 88 percent of all consumer goods were produced in the home for the household. One generation later, in 1915, that was totally reversed—over 85 percent of all consumer goods were now produced *outside the home*. The eventual effects of this one reality alone brought staggering changes to our culture, including especially all the new opportunities that women began to enjoy, including:

- equal opportunities for education,
- the (nearly unheard of) right for women to vote,
- and, eventually, the right to serve in almost every way in the public domain.

But it also resulted in our homes being thought of as havens of refuge from the world out there and, until recently, as the place for the nuclear family to exist—a nearly sacred concept in Western culture that was totally foreign to Paul’s world.

The fact that our cultural assumptions are so different from theirs makes it difficult for us even to imagine how absolutely radical and earth-shattering the Christian gospel sounded in their ears. Take especially Paul’s conclusion to his argument with the Galatians over true ecclesiology, having to do with Jew and Gentile as members together in the one household of God. “In Christ,” he says, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ.”

But such a revolutionary statement was not intended to abolish the structures, which were held in place by Roman law. Rather, it was intended forever to do away with the significance attached to such structural differences, which pitted one group of human beings against another. And the most radical thing of all was that such people—Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women—shared a common meal together, itself a cause for cultural shame, and thus celebrated their Lord’s death until he was to come again—which, as 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 makes clear, created considerable tension for the traditional

householder. No wonder the world had such difficulty with these early Christians, and why they were considered to be “haters of humanity,” because they so willingly broke the rules—not by tearing down the structures, but by making them ultimately irrelevant! Such people are greatly to be feared as the worst of all possible anarchists.

So what in the end is it that makes our present text so radically countercultural? What Paul obviously did *not* do was to demolish the structures and create new ones. What was radical lay in his urging those who are filled with the Spirit and worship Christ as Lord to have totally transformed relationships within the household.

Thus wives and slaves, respectively, are to continue to submit and obey but now to do so as those who are thereby *servicing the Lord*. And that changes things. But the more radical change is for the male householder, whose model is Christ and his love for the church. Christ is thus the “savior of the body” (a remarkable phrase indeed). In this case, however, Paul is not emphasizing salvation from sin (although that, too, of course is finally included). Rather, “savior” is the most common designation for the emperor. Used of God in the Old Testament (as God my Savior), it most often carries its more common sense of provider and protector (cf. 4:15–16).

Note then the only thing that is said to the householder in terms of his relationship to his wife. Three times—at the beginning (v. 25), in the middle (v. 28), and at the end (v. 33)—Paul says the one truly radical thing: “Love your wife.” That does not refer to either romance or sex, but to him giving his life in loving service to her. And note that there is regular emphasis on “his *own* wife.”

The model is Christ’s love for the church; look at how Paul expresses that. The imagery is that of a man taking a bride; Paul provides this with a marvelous echoing of Old Testament language from Ezekiel 16, where God betroths Israel, the naked and orphaned teenager, and washes her and dresses her in the finest of clothes.

Thus Paul now images the husband as treating his wife as just such a bride, adorned and glorious to behold. It is assumed that he will continue to provide leadership to the household, but his role will be radically transformed into one of caring for the people within the household for *their* own sakes, not having them around to serve *his* own self interests. This is also why the Christian household, which is always a kind of nucleus of the larger Christian community, should always be understood as the first place where all the other imperatives are to find their first place of existence. The household, which was also the church, was the place where Christian life had to be put into practice.

We would do well here to go back and reread chapter 5 in light of this reality. Here is the more abbreviated version in the letter that is the companion to this one, excerpted from the full text of Colossians 3:12–4:1:

12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

This, I would urge, is how these texts finally apply to us and to our homes. In the end, the structures are immaterial since they are predicated altogether on cultural givens that are simply not ours. Indeed, in light of this text, the structures are ultimately irrelevant, except that some structure must be in place or the household will fall apart. But these depend largely on the people involved, their own giftings, personalities, and how they relate to each other.

But whatever the structure, at issue is that we live Christlike in our relationships with one another in our homes.

God calls us to Peace, shalom to be filled with the Spirit, and thus submitting ourselves to one another in reverence to Christ to love with Christ’s love, by self-sacrificial giving of ourselves.

If we do that, the matter of structures will pale into insignificance.



*Gordon Fee is professor of New Testament at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, Canada. He has written numerous books and commentaries, including *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Eerdmans, 2000). He taught previously at Wheaton College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. This article was first presented at CBE's international conference in Dallas last June and has been edited for publication. The drawings on page 9 are reproduced from *Families in the New Testament World*; © 1997 Carolyn Osiek and David L. Balch. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.*

Women in Leadership and Ministry

Unit 9

How Do I Choose the Better Part?

Development Associates International

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Version 3.3

D.A.I. P.O. Box 49278 Colorado Springs, CO 80949-9278 USA

Tel. (719) 598-7970 / Fax (719) 884-0668

Web: www.daintl.org

E-Mail: info@daintl.org



Unit 9: How Do I Choose the Better Part?

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Readings:

“Women in the Maze: Questions & Answer on Biblical Equality”
By Ruth A. Tucker Chapters 20-23

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Understand and state the implications of what you have learned in this course for your life and ministry.
- Continue to carefully study questions about interpreting scripture for today.
- Articulate different principles that distinguish between being a good steward of your gifts and the gifts of those serving under you versus fighting for your rights in your own strength.

Introduction

You are about to begin studying a segment of a course called *Women in Leadership and Ministry*. This unit is titled *How Do I Choose the Better Part?* It is about thinking through the implications of everything you have learned in this course for your own life. What do you do now? What changes do you need to make, if any? How can you be the best steward of your own gifts and the gifts of those you are leading?

Case Study: Dr. Aziz Chooses His Priorities

Once again the week passed very quickly for Rebecca. She sat with Elisabeth in church, Dr. Aziz was away teaching at a church across the city. Rebecca wondered during the week what they would talk about on their next visit. She knew that even though a lot of her questions had been answered, she still had a lot more to ask and lot more to learn. She hoped their time would not end so soon.

“Now I have a question for you Rebecca.” Dr. Aziz began. “Where do we go from here?”

“I am not quite sure I understand, Dr. Aziz, what do you mean?”

“Knowing truth is one thing, but living it is quite another. How do you intend to implement what you have learned?”

“The most important thing to me is not that I can now fight my way into some position of leadership, no. But for me I somehow feel validated as a woman. I know God has created me with certain talents and abilities and I want to use them to minister to others. I want to seek ministry not position. If the positions come along then I will gladly step into them and do the best job I can. But primarily I want to encourage and release others to be the men and women God has created them to be, that working together we can make a difference for the Kingdom of God.”

“You have learned the most important thing and I certainly did not teach you that, the Holy Spirit has been at work in your heart, service and ministry come first.”

“However, on a practical note.” Dr. Aziz continued “Let me share a remarkable incident that happened to me several years ago. I was invited to be one of the speakers at the Truth and Reconciliation Committee’s annual conference in Capetown, South Africa. This was when Nelson Mandela was still president. I had a chance to meet him very briefly at a reception and was immensely impressed with the man. A few days later I was invited by a friend to visit Robben Island. This is the island where Mandela and many others were imprisoned. It is located seven miles out in the harbor of Capetown, it took about twenty-five minutes by boat to get there. If I remember correctly, he spent about eighteen years of his twenty-nine years in prison on Robben Island. The men who lead the tours and drive the buses that take you around the island are all ex-prisoners. So their stories and experiences and commentary were first hand. We were able to visit the actual cell where Mandela was kept. Cell # 5, I believe, first cell on the right at the head of the corridor. The cell was only approximately six feet square, and a small window, high on the wall looked out over the courtyard. At first the cell was completely bare, except for a thin straw mat to sleep on. I was so moved by the experience that when I returned I purchased his autobiography and read it in just a few days. I asked myself, how could a man locked up in a tiny cell on a remote island eventually bring change to a vast and powerful government?”

“The book was fascinating reading and there were many truths that stood out, but one concept seemed to embed itself deep with in my soul and I have not forgotten it. When Mandela and the other black inmates first arrived on the island, they were issued short pants. All the other prisoners were given long pants. The blacks were not given any bread, but the other prisoners received a daily ration of bread. There were several seemingly small, at least to me, injustices. While Mandela was caged in his small cell, he thought, I am out of the big battle, others will have to carry that forward. But I can speak up about the injustices I face every day. I will fight the small battles. He fought for years to get the blacks to be given

long trousers, equal food and so on. I have never forgotten that. He fought the small battles that he faced on a daily basis and eventually won the war. Something to think about, my dear.”

Rebecca did not respond, but the look on her face told all. Her eyes slowly closed till there was just a small slit of an opening, her brow had seemed to go in the other direction, till it was high and alert. Her lips moved together and out just a bit. She sat in silence. The point had been well taken.

Just then Elisabeth came into the room, Rebecca moved over to make room for her and seemingly wanting to change the subject, said “I almost forgot, next month on the 15th, I have been invited to attend a reception, well actually,” she shifted uncomfortably on the sofa and looked a bit embarrassed, “I am to receive a special presentation in recognition of my work at the hospital among the children with AIDS. It is really only a very small gathering, sponsored by one of the charities in town. I know you have a very busy schedule and I certainly understand if you can’t make it, but I was wondering if you would attend it with me, it would mean a lot.”

Dr. Aziz got up and walked to his desk and looked at his calendar, Elisabeth noticed that he hesitated just a second and asked again about the date.

“The 15th of next month.” Rebecca responded.

Again Elisabeth noticed a slight pause, then Dr. Aziz said “Yes of course, Rebecca I think we can make it, it would be an honor.”

After Rebecca had left that evening, Elisabeth walked back to Dr. Aziz’s office and stood at the door. Dr. Aziz looked up from his reading.

She walked over to him and gently put her hand on his shoulder. “Ishmael are you sure you want to do this. I know how much you were looking forward to being the main speaker at the European Society’s annual banquet next month. I think I saw the tickets for Paris arrive the other day in the mail. It would have been the grand achievement of your career, to speak to so many of your colleagues. It really is a great honor. Rebecca would certainly understand.”

Dr. Aziz turned slightly in his swivel chair and looked up at Elisabeth. “I am an old man, full of years and honors, probably more than I deserve, now it is time for me to give back. Elisabeth, do you remember how many music recitals, school functions, graduations, how many holidays I missed how many precious days of our children’s lives were wasted? I can remember sitting in those lonely hotel rooms all over the world, holding the trophies of success, but feeling so empty inside. Those cold plaques and fading letters of recognition have brought me no warmth or happiness, not like one hug or kiss from one of our children can. And now look at them, they collect dust in a forgotten corner. No I have for too long chased these things that Jesus warned me about, now I believe my heart and treasure are finally in the same place.”

Elisabeth gently placed her right hand on Ishmael’s shoulder. She bent over and kissed him kindly on the forehead. Without saying a word she turned and walked down the hallway toward the kitchen. A small tear was gleaming on her cheek and a faint smile was on her lips.

* This scenario is fictitious. Any resemblance to an existing organization or person is entirely coincidental and unintended.

Lecturette:

I hope you’ve taken time to read both the readings for this unit before we begin this section. Each is really powerful and speaks directly to this issue that is at the heart of this course. What would God have us do? Reflecting back to the beginning unit of this course, how do we “choose the best part?” What should each of us do to see God’s Kingdom accurately reflected to the rest of the world, through the Church body we are a part of? How

can we most effectively be good stewards of the gifts God has given us in spite of whatever limitations we might be facing? How do we confront those limitations in a way that brings honor and glory to God rather than creating strife and division? These are challenging questions, which we are going to “wrestle” with in this unit.

Let’s begin this section by stopping and taking time to read a very familiar passage in Matthew, Chapter 25:14-30. This is the portion of scripture we refer to as the parable of the talents. This is where I want to begin this unit because this is really the issue before us. How can I best use what God has given me? What does God expect of me? What does He say to us through His scripture about these issues?

Answer Box # 1

Stop now and Read Matt. 25:14—30 then answer the question below.

What are the principles that you find in this parable that apply to your life today when it comes to being a good steward of your gifts and talents, or the gifts and talents of those you lead?

I hope you enjoyed that process of looking through the verses and finding the principles that might apply to our lives today. You may have found many different things. Since this is a parable that Jesus does not fully explain there may be many meanings, but let me share with you the five principles that I found.

First of all, each slave is given something. It may not seem like much to us, but that doesn’t matter. The story even says that things are not equal, that some are given more than others. What is important though is that each is given something. What we think of that talent also doesn’t matter. Maybe we are able to sing, but we look around us and see others who sing better. It doesn’t matter, what is important is to make the very most out of that talent that we have. Exercise it, try to use it at least a little bit, look for opportunities and God will bless it with growth. This is a command, not a suggestion!

Secondly, Faithfulness in the small things is required! God is saying that what He requires is faithfulness and obedience, not so that others will see it, or that we are responsible necessarily for the results, but rather it is about obedience! All God asks us to do is take the next small step of obedience.

Think about an example in your own life when you have been faithful with the small task God has given you, and then He’s blessed the results.

Answer Box # 2

Stop and think about a time when you did a small thing in obedience to how you believed was God’s leading. What were the results? Did God surprise you with His faithfulness?

I hope you thought of lots of examples! I remember clearly, living in the Middle East and looking around at the needs of other young mothers in the community. We were living in

the capital city of Nicosia, Cyprus and I had two small babies. I certainly had little “free” time and even when I had a few minutes the boys were there! I often met different women in the shops near my house and we would sometimes talk about being lonely, or wishing we could go to a bible study or prayer group, but none of us could afford a babysitter, or find regular transportation to attend the groups held at the local church. One day, out of my own need, I asked the Lord if He wanted me to start a mother’s prayer group. I’d never led a prayer group, and I really didn’t know where to start, but every time I sat down to pray I felt like God kept nudging me and saying, “try it, I’ll help you, just take the chance.”

Finally I started calling women I’d met and sort of apologetically saying things like, “I doubt if you’d be interested in this, but I was thinking about a few of us getting together on Thursday mornings to pray.” Without exception each one I called said yes! Before I knew it, we had a living room full of women and babies each Thursday morning, sharing, praying, worshipping—often having to yell over the sounds of children playing and crying! What a wonderful time we had. Before I knew it, non-Christians were coming and one or two even accepted Jesus! All I did was simply obey Jesus, and He made it work for His glory. That’s all He ever asks us to do. The thing is, it always involves a risk—but we’ll talk more about that in a moment.

The third principle we can glean from this passage is that a time of settling accounts will come. (See verse 19) We will have to stand before the Master and explain what we did with what He gave us. It doesn’t matter whether we are a man or a woman. There is nothing about gender in this parable. The parable is for all believers and applies across the board for all of us.

I believe that for women the enemy is very subtle, confusing us on this particular issue. One of my friends is the wife of the director of one of the largest mission organizations in the world. She was telling me about taking part in some counseling courses where they were testing various people and helping them figure out how to best use their gifts and talents. One of the things she noticed that disturbed her was that some women who were tested were literally holding back their talents. When asked about this they replied that they were afraid they would overshadow their husbands or make them feel threatened. Yet looking at the situation objectively it was obvious that the husband needed exactly that gift that the wife was holding back.

We need to be careful that we don’t try to act like we are God, or assume He made some mistake by giving us a certain gift. When we are able to do something we need to step forward and be willing to do it. We need to take the talent we have and utilize it to the maximum.

Other women I’ve met try desperately to fit into a certain mold or role when in fact that is not what they are good at, at all. They believe that women are expected to do certain things, and even though they know they are not good at that, they try to do it, just to please others. God expects us to take what He has given us and make the very most of it, not bury it because we are afraid it may offend someone, or be like someone else because that seems to make others happy. We are to be everything God has designed us uniquely to be.

There is a very serious consequence here in scripture if we fail to utilize what God has given us. This servant had everything taken away from him and was banished into darkness eternally. That’s a very high price to pay for failing to use what God has given us. This is incredibly serious business here. The bible seems to be talking about losing our very salvation over this issue. God obviously takes this very seriously.

How would this apply to men who are leaders in the church or Christian organizations?

Answer Box # 3

Stop and answer the following question.

How do you apply this aspect of the parable to men who are leaders when we are thinking about this issue of releasing women? We’ve already talked about ways women can fail here, but what about men? You certainly don’t want to cause controversy in your church over an unimportant issue, but what does this parable seem to be saying about the importance of utilizing gifts and talents?

What if you are a pastor and you’ve been given several talented women in your church who are capable of leading or teaching, but you don’t utilize them well. Instead you “bury” them in the back of the church, or tell them that the only roles available to them are caring for the children and providing hospitality for guests. Of course both of these are very important roles, however some women may have other giftings that God has given them, but they cannot utilize them unless you, as the leader provide an opportunity. Would this parable apply to you in that situation as the “steward” of those women and their gifts? Would the consequences apply?

Let’s move on to **the fourth principle I found here, that fear is no excuse.** (verse 25) The slave in this story was genuinely afraid wasn’t he, and rightfully so. The master proved this by the way he reacted and banished the servant for his failures. What if we are truly afraid to be faithful in the use of our gifts?

Christians in many nations know what it is like to be truly afraid for their lives. Maybe you are one of those. We lived in the Middle East for a number of years and there some believers faced incredible persecution for their faith. I have never had to face that kind of fear on a regular basis, but I know that it can be paralyzing, yet if you are willing to wisely follow God’s lead, you can overcome fear. God will take care of you. He promises this over and over again.

Psalms 27:1-3 says it best. Let’s stop a minute and read this together because I think it definitely applies to this situation.

Answer Box # 4

Stop and read Psalms 27:1-3

Reflect on how this applies to things you fear in your life. It may be the very real threat of physical persecution for your faith. Or, it may be an equally real fear of doing the wrong thing, or failing. Meditate on this passage for a few minutes alone and see what God speaks to your heart about.

Isn’t it good to stop and remember that there is nothing we can face that God has not thought of, nothing we fear that Jesus did not face. The one thing we can be sure of is that the source of fear that stops us from using our talents is always Satan. There are no exceptions. If fear is stopping you from using your talents, or utilizing the talents of those God has put under your leadership then the only possibility is that Satan is lying to you. The bible tells us that Satan is the father of lies

So how do we get free from fear? What is the practical principle here? That is the fifth principle in this parable I believe. It is the principle that the fear of God is the cure to failing in this area.

Stop a minute and look at Proverbs 31, verse 20. This is that wonderful chapter about the Godly woman that describes her doing everything from running a business, to buying land, to managing her household, and caring for the poor and needy. It is an exciting chapter, but let’s just take a minute and look at this one verse.

Answer Box # 5

Stop and read Proverbs 31:30, then answer the questions below.

What does this verse tell us in reference to God?

What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? What are some practical examples of what that looks like?

So what did you think of from this passage? What does it mean to fear the Lord? I believe it means several things. In order to fear God, you have to know who He is. The truth will set us free. When we understand He is a loving father, that He gave us the gifts that we have to be used for his glory, when we understand what scripture actually says about women—all these things lead us to understand God well enough to walk in the fear of Him.

Another aspect is to fear God more than we fear Man! What does that mean? Well, maybe for the pastor of a church it means making the decision to follow God’s principles in releasing women, even though it will upset some people—maybe even upset people who are wealthy and give a lot of money and support to the church. Who do we fear most, God or man? Not always such a simple or easy question to answer.

Another aspect of fearing God is to believe He is a just and wise God who will never violate His own principles. Mutual submission in marriage I believe is one of His principles. Will God lead you to do something that your spouse does not want you to do? Not an easy question, but my experience has shown me that sometimes we fear this happening more than it actually does. Maybe if you show real love and respect to your spouse consistently then when you want to do something that you feel God is leading you to do, God will speak to them about it as well. If you are married to a believer, it is sometimes the way we approach these issues that causes problems more than the issue itself.

Let me give you a recent example in my marriage. I have to travel a lot for my work. That is something that my husband doesn’t really like, yet he recognizes it is right for now and that God is calling me to that. Recently I’ve been asked to serve on several boards of ministries. Doing that would often involve more travel. Many I say “no” to fairly easily, but recently when I prayed over an invitation I felt that God might be saying that I was to accept it. I went to my husband and told him what I felt, but I left the decision to him. I told him that if he felt it was not right I would turn it down. He then had the freedom to honestly pray about it and hear from God himself rather than have me pushing him for a certain decision, or trying to manipulate him for a certain answer. He came back to me later and agreed that I should accept. There have been other times when he asked me not to accept things that I thought I should do. In almost every case he was right, and even in the ones where he was wrong, God managed to make things come out for His own purposes. In turn, he gives me the same opportunity to pray about invitations he gets, to decide whether or not they are the right thing for him to accept. We love and serve each other in this way.

Often we are extreme one way or the other on this issue, either pushing so hard to do something in spite of the checks and balances God has given us, or too afraid to step out and take a risk. Usually this is a personality or gifting issue. Some of us are so strong willed

that we force our decisions on others. However, I believe more women have a tendency to pull back, or avoid anything they feel like would be a confrontational situation, or somehow “unsubmissive”, so they simply never utilize gifts and talents out of a misguided fear of doing the wrong thing.

Let’s stop and take a look at a couple of stories from the Old Testament that speak about this particular issue in women’s lives. Let’s begin with the famous story of Esther.

Answer Box # 6

Stop and read *Esther 4:13,14* (If you are not familiar with the entire story take the time to go back and read the whole book of *Esther*.)

What do you believe Mordecai meant by the last sentence in verse 14. “...And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” How does this apply to what we have been talking about with the use of our gifts and talents?

This story is an incredible one of complexity, culture, extreme situations that are not very favorable for women, etc. God does not fix all of that in this story does He? Sometimes we wait and expect God to change our situations, to make everything fair and equal, to bring justice. BUT, God doesn’t always do that and He doesn’t promise that He will on this earth. What He does promise is that He will give us the grace to do what He asks us to do. And he demands obedience. If we do all that we can do, He will do the rest.

Esther’s situation is incredibly risky, isn’t it. Part of Esther’s way of obeying what she believes God is asking her to do is to make herself as beautiful as possible, put on lots of make-up, serve the King lots of wine—oh this doesn’t necessarily fit our theology now does it!!! But, this is scripture also, and it is exactly part of how Esther obeys God, takes this amazing risk and saves her people!

Esther is in an amazingly horrible situation that cannot be easy. She is the queen, yet with no rights, no access to the King beyond what he extends to her when she arrives, the last Queen lost all of her position because she refused the King’s order. In fact, if you look at Chapter 1, especially verses 10-22. It seems that the wise men basically advised the King to get a new queen so that women everywhere would be afraid not to give honor to their husbands. Some issues are not new, are they?

But seriously, let’s just take a minute here to talk about the difference between the modern “feminist” movement and the biblical basis for women using their gifts that this whole course has been about. Think about it for a few minutes, what is the difference in these two ways of thinking?

Answer Box # 7

Stop and answer the following question before continuing with the workbook.

What is the primary difference between the modern “feminist” movement that demands rights and justice for all women, and this study that discusses the biblical basis for women in leadership?

The primary difference between these two ways of thinking has to do with the focus. The feminist movement focuses primarily on me, or us as women, and what is best for us, what rights we should have, on demanding justice and equality for me!

This study focuses on God, what does He want, what are His purposes, and how can we obey to accomplish those. This is not about MY life and living it the way I want to, this is all about God and doing what He wants us to do, no matter what the cost.

Esther wasn't a feminist fighting for her rights. She was a Godly woman who literally laid down her life to obey God's call. That is the difference. Do Godly women ask the Church to release them into ministry so that they can do what they want to do? NO! Godly women only seek to follow God's call and use their gifts within whatever context they find themselves. Sometimes that involves taking risks and going against our own cultures. Other times it means quietly serving in the roles that we are given to play. Obedience to God's leading is our only guiding standard.

Now we need to look at one more bible story here just to help us see a completely different angle to “obedience.” Open up your bibles to the story of Abigail and David, in I Samuel chapter 25.

Answer Box # 8

Stop and Read I Samuel 25:2-42

Go back and read verses 14-19. How did Abigail respond in this situation? What is surprising about how she responded in light of our understanding of a woman's role in this culture?

This is a shocking story—and it's in the bible! Sometimes when I read the Old Testament stories I realize there is nothing on modern television that even comes close to the tales of intrigue that happened and are recorded in scripture. That is what I love about scripture sometimes. It is so real. It is not so “super spiritual” or “holy” that we cannot identify with it or understand it.

In this story Abigail does the wise thing. She intervenes and saves her household, but she has to do it by going behind her husband's back. She even tells David that Nabal is a worthless fool and God uses her to save everyone, including Nabal! Then, just to shock us even more, Nabal dies ten days later and David marries her!

Now, our immediate thought is that this is Old Testament and therefore we can't follow Abigail's example here too closely—and that may be somewhat true. But, it is still a bible story of a brave, wise and beautiful woman who had the courage to use the gifts and talents she had to save her entire household! It's interesting in I Samuel 25:3 Abigail is described as “intelligent and beautiful in appearance.” Obviously she had those gifts from God. And it would seem that she used both of them to influence David and stop him from attacking her household.

Least we use only Old Testament texts in this area of using our gifts, take time to turn to Romans 16 and read the first few verses there containing Paul's commendations and greetings.

Answer Box # 9

Stop and turn to Romans 16 and read the first 16 verses.

What does Paul commend about the different people he mentions in these verses? He gives recommendations about them. What does he identify as things that are worthwhile?

It is noteworthy here that Paul greets roughly 28 individuals of which 11 are women. He specifically commends the work of six women and six men. It may be that he commends a higher percentage of the women mentioned because in the culture they need more commendation, or simply that they were so outstanding.

The point here is that Paul is commending these men and women without reference to their gender, for using their gifts to build up the body. They are not assigned different roles because of their gender as some would like to try and insert into these passages. Rather, Paul sees them as individuals, equal, gifted and commended for using those gifts to the maximum for the benefit of The Church. That is the picture clearly presented as the norm in the Pauline epistles as we talked about earlier in units 5 through 8.

I would like to close this unit with a terribly important aspect of this idea of using our gifts. It is truly the thing that separates secular efforts from Godly ones. It is the way we guard our hearts from stepping beyond the boundaries of the wise use of our gifts. It is the focus of prayer.

Stop and turn back with me to the book of Esther. Look again at Chapter 4 verses 15-17.

Answer Box # 10

Stop and read *Esther 4:15-17*

What is Esther’s strategy in approaching this challenge?

Esther doesn’t just decide to solve the problem on her own, using her gifts. She calls all those she knows to intercede and she and her maidens also stop to pray and fast. Then she will take the risk, do what she can, use her gifts in the best way possible. BUT it is really important to note that she leaves the results in God’s hands. Verse 16 “...and if I perish, I perish.”

God never asks us to do things in our own strength and power. He asks us to do the possible, but let Him do the impossible. In this case with Esther, she was living in a terrible unjust situation where she as a woman had little power. She wasn’t going before the King to prove anything about herself. Rather she was taking the risk and confronting the powers to save her people as well as herself in this case. She sought counsel, used her mind and spirit to decide what she thought she should do, sought God’s intervention and empowerment to do it, then took the risk, trusting God, not herself, or men in power, for the results.

This is what God is asking us to do today. He wants us to model this wonderful combination of using our best efforts within His will, and through His means, to make the most impact possible for His Kingdom. Are you doing that today? Are you willing to take the risks? Is there something in your heart that you know God has been asking you to step out and do, but you’ve been afraid. Maybe you have really good reasons to be afraid. But as we saw earlier, fear is never an adequate excuse for failure when God is calling us and empowering us for a task.

Take a look with me at your final assignment. This is an assignment that requires prayer and listening to God. I want you to ask yourself the question, what is God asking me to do that is risky? What is the dream He has placed in my heart? Why am I here at such a time as this?

If you are a woman taking this course it may be that there are unique barriers in the way of you accomplishing this thing that is on your heart. Don’t worry, God never says that

we have to carry out His calling on our own. Don't try to make it happen all by yourself. Pray, ask God to remove the things that are stopping you that you do not have the authority to remove yourself. Maybe you feel God is asking you to bring change in a ghetto, or slum area of your city, but you know the government authorities or some other force will make that almost impossible. Don't worry. You don't have to do this in your own strength. If God is calling you to do it, He will bring it about if you take the first small steps of obedience.

Remember back to our story at the beginning of today's unit and the example of Nelson Mandela in prison. He couldn't change his circumstances could he? Many of us find ourselves in that position, we find ourselves in a very limited and difficult situation. Maybe it's not as bad as prison, or maybe it's worse. We don't necessarily have the luxury of leaving the situation. But, all God asks is for us to do what we can do. In Nelson Mandela's case, it was work toward equality in the daily lives of the black prisoners. That was such a “small” thing really—yet in God's Kingdom, things aren't measured in size the way we measure them. God just asks us to do the next right thing.

If we sense God is asking us to make a difference with poor people near us, maybe we can't impact a whole slum, but we can impact one life, and then another life and just maybe God will multiply those efforts and we will see a whole neighborhood change, or a whole people group reached with the gospel, or a whole nation impacted.

I direct a ministry called Development Associates International. It is a ministry to come alongside Christian leaders and help them grow in their integrity and effectiveness. Being the president of such a ministry is not something I ever wanted to do, and not something I could have made happen had I wanted to. As a part of this ministry in its early days I was praying one morning in my hotel room in Seoul, Korea during the GCOWE meetings there in 1995. I was calmly reading through a Psalm, Psalms 2:8 when suddenly the words seemed jump off the page at me.

“Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Thy possession.” I fell to my knees in that hotel room and wept. I knew what God was saying to me through this verse. He was calling me to reach leaders across the world. This was not the first time He had given me this message, but I had literally forgotten the first time until I knelt there and he brought it back to mind. That had taken place during a meeting I was attending in Delhi, India in 1992. Nearly the same words came back to me again.

It hit me in exactly the same way then as it does now—“Who me?” And immediately I began explaining to God that He must have made a mistake, that I must have misunderstood Him, that surely He couldn't mean me because I can't do this! But that still small voice came back to me, over and over “...ask of me, ask of me” quickly followed by, “not my will but Thine be done.”

I didn't have any idea then that I would end up leading this ministry! Thankfully God doesn't usually show us everything at once that He intends for us because that truly would scare us to death! Instead He just encourages us to take that first small step of obedience. Do the possible and let Him do the impossible.

Below you will find your final assignment for this unit.

Final Assignment

Final Assignment

Think back through this unit and ask God to show you what specifically you need to get from it. What risk is God asking you to take? What talent or gift have you buried and been unwilling to use? What lie have you believed that has stopped you from doing what you know God is calling you to do? What dream has God planted in your heart that you believe He is calling you to do? Who do you need to support that is trying to take a risk?

Stop and take the time to pray about these questions. Ask God to show you anything that He wants to in this area. Trust Him to do that and take the time to listen.

Now, write down the thing that you believe He is asking you to do. What are the steps He wants you to take to accomplish this thing? Write down any barriers that you are afraid could stop it from taking place.

Now, share this with a prayer partner for prayer, fasting, and holding each other accountable to take the steps that are possible and believe God to do the impossible!

Readings

Women in the Maze

Questions & Answers on Biblical Equality*

By Ruth A. Tucker

*This is reproduced by special permission from Ruth A. Tucker, *Women in the Maze: Questions & Answers on Biblical Equality*

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Chapter 20: **Why Have Women Historically Found Ministry in Sectarian Movements?**

At the time of the Protestant Reformation and in the centuries following, sectarian movements arose—many of which developed into today's respected religious bodies. In the early years, however, they were viewed with suspicion and outright hostility by the "respectable" denominations. Like the "heretics" of the medieval period, these groups severed their ties from the institutionalized churches, and in doing so they opened doors of ministry to laity, both men and women. Often in sectarian movements—at least in the early stages of development—visions and direct revelations are claimed as proof of God's endorsement. Such a religious mentality by its very nature does not discriminate between male and female. Women were as inclined—or more so—to claim special spiritual illumination as were men. So while men may not have overtly encouraged women preachers and prophets, this "theological loophole"—the sanctioning of visions and revelations—"left the door ajar" for women to enter.¹

Why were the early Quakers rumored to be a women's cult?

The door was left ajar for women in almost every sectarian movement in the post-Reformation era, but in none more than the Quakers. Indeed, there were so many women actively involved in the initial stages of that movement that it was rumored to be a "women's cult." The Quakers—officially the Society of Friends—were founded by George Fox, but equally important in those formative years was Margaret Fell, who later became his wife. One of my former colleagues—a church history professor—commented to his class, in reference to her, that one way to become famous in a religious movement is to marry the founder. That may be true in some cases, but my colleague was slighting Margaret Fell when he put her in this category. She was a prominent leader in the movement long before she married Fox, and during the marriage the two were often separated, going their separate ways preaching, or imprisoned in different jails.

Although Margaret was ten years older than George, she outlived him by more than a decade, and during that time she was able to hold the movement together amid dissension. Her booklet *Womens Speaking Justified* was a well-reasoned defense of women's ministries based on biblical texts.

Other Quaker women served with equal distinction. In fact, many of the most noted Quakers were women. Elizabeth Hooton, Mary Fisher and Mary Dyer all sailed to the American colonies as missionaries only to be imprisoned or exiled or worse. Dyer was hanged in Boston for her refusal to discontinue her preaching. The most celebrated of all the Quaker women, however, was Elizabeth Fry. She was an English prison reformer who single-handedly transformed Newgate Prison and influenced similar reform at home and abroad. Indeed, her work was so remarkable that it caught the attention of foreign dignitaries. When Frederick William IV, King of Prussia, visited England, he asked to have a meeting with her. John Randolph, a Virginia legislator, contrasted his visit with her to his experiences at the British Museum, Parliament and the Tower of London, commenting that they "sink into utter insignificance in comparison to Elizabeth Fry."ⁱⁱⁱ

What role did women play in early Methodism?

The most fascinating woman in early Methodism was not actually a Methodist. She was Susanna Wesley, an avowed Anglican, who as a teenager turned away from her father's Nonconformist beliefs. She married Samuel Wesley, an Anglican priest, and in the years that followed gave birth to nineteen children, among them John and Charles Wesley. Her marital problems are well known, especially the incident that prompted her husband to abandon her and the children. When she refused to say "amen" to his prayer for King William—she being a supporter only of the Stuart line of royalty—he retaliated by leaving home, insisting, "if we have two kings, we must have two beds." This was not his only absence. His term in debtors' prison, brought about by charges from his own parishioners, also left Susanna alone—but certainly not without resources of her own. Indeed, the Sunday church services she began for her own children soon attracted the whole community—so many that some had to be turned away. When Samuel complained, she wrote back: "I cannot conceive, why any should reflect upon you, because your wife endeavors to draw people to church.... As to its looking peculiar, I grant it does. And so does almost anything that is serious, or that may in any way advance the glory of God, or the salvation of souls." Years later John referred to his mother as a "preacher of righteousness"—a fitting description.ⁱⁱⁱ

Among the followers of John Wesley were many women who carried on the tradition of preachers of righteousness. Wesley himself was initially less than enthusiastic about women preachers, but he soon realized that they were the backbone of his movement. One such woman was Mary Fletcher, who was married to one of the movement's prominent leaders. After his death, she continued in the ministry, preaching at times to crowds numbering more than three thousand. Her greatest legacy, however, was her success in building harmony between the Methodists and Anglicans— an accomplishment that very few men were able to equal.^{iv}

Another woman who played a crucial role in early Methodism was Lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. Her wealth made her an important figure in the movement, but she was far more than a financial benefactor. Her various estates were turned into chapels, and she opened a school to train preachers—a band of itinerants that became known as the "Huntingdon Connection." She was deeply involved in doctrinal issues, strongly supporting the Calvinist position held by George Whitefield. At one point she dismissed the Arminian followers of John Wesley from her training school, but her dominant inclination was to bring about reconciliation in a movement that was torn by doctrinal controversies.^v

There is another woman in Methodism whose story deserves mention. She was my grandmother, Ida Carlton. I will never forget one Sunday many years ago when we arrived for dinner just as she was coming home from church. She was noticeably upset. Though she was nearly eighty, she had faithfully walked more than a mile to and from church every Sunday. On this day, however, she was determined not to go back again. The minister had admitted in his sermon that he did not believe that Jesus was God. She was too old to find a new church, and she died not long afterward. Her funeral was conducted by the man who did not believe that Jesus is God.

Most of the women in Methodism have not been great leaders. They have been ordinary women like my grandmother who simply believed the message that Wesley preached. Today the Methodist church is turning away from that biblical foundation. It may be left to the women— leaders and laity—to bring the church back to its heritage.

How did the Salvation Army view women?

It is sad when church history texts name William Booth as the founder of the Salvation Army and go on to describe that organization with no mention of the cofounder, Catherine Booth, William's wife. But that is often the case. "As so frequently happens in the writing of history," laments Patricia Hill, "the women have simply disappeared."^{vi}

Catherine Booth was a preacher's wife and the mother of eight children, but that did not prevent her from becoming a humanitarian leader in her own right as well as a preacher to audiences ranging from slum missions to affluent congregations. She was a forthright

feminist whose views powerfully influenced the development of the Salvation Army. Indeed, there were no gender barriers in that organization—at least in the early years. The Booth daughters all became regional leaders—most notably Evangeline, who served as commander in the United States and was eventually promoted to general.

Women served as evangelists, many beginning as teenagers. Eliza Shirley was sixteen when she became an Army lieutenant, and soon after that she was preaching to large crowds of people who filled a Philadelphia warehouse. She was only one of an enthusiastic band of "Hallelujah lassies" who spread out over the globe to serve the needy and save souls.^{vii}

The tradition of strong women in the Salvation Army continues today. In 1986, Eva Burrows, an Australian, became the general in charge of the worldwide, one-and-a-half-million-member movement.

What role did women play in nineteenth-century American revivalism?

Since colonial times, revivalism has been a prominent feature of American religion. The names of the great revivalists are very familiar: Whitefield, Edwards, Finney, Moody, Sunday, Graham. But women also were known on the evangelistic circuit and often provided an added flavor to what was sometimes perceived as an all-male profession.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, Clarissa Danforth captivated crowds in New England. People who were attracted by the sensation of a woman preacher often came away converted. Though she was a Freewill Baptist, in Rhode Island "almost all houses of worship . . . were opened for her, and ministers and people in multitudes flocked to hear." One revival lasted out for nearly a year and a half.^{viii}

It was among the Methodists that women found the greatest opportunities for revival ministries. Jerena Lee, a Black woman and a member of the African Episcopal Church, traveled widely during the early decades of the nineteenth century. She faced considerable opposition from ministers in her own denomination, but clung to her powerful and personal sense of calling.^{ix}

Another Methodist woman known for her evangelistic preaching was

Maggie Van Cott, who was on the "sawdust trail" for thirty years during the last half of the nineteenth century. At the height of her career, she preached some four hundred sermons and made more than seventeen hundred converts in a single year. Her ministry was so influential that she was sometimes compared to evangelist Dwight L. Moody. The most widely acclaimed woman evangelist of the nineteenth century—another Methodist—was Phoebe Palmer, often referred to as the "Mother of the Holiness Movement." As a social activist, she was the founder of the Five Points Mission and other benevolent works, but it was her revival ministry that brought her recognition from the masses. She traveled with her husband in the United States, Canada and England, where hundreds were converted in single meetings. It is estimated that some twenty-five thousand people were converted as a result of her evangelistic ministry.^x

ⁱ Joyce 1. Irwin, *Womanhood in Radical Protestantism, 1525-1675* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1979), pp. 202-3.

ⁱⁱ Edith Deen, *Great Women of the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), pp. 164-71.

ⁱⁱⁱ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. I (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1959), pp. 385-86.

^{iv} Ruth A. Tucker, *First Ladies of the Parish: Historical Portraits of Pastors' Wives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 67-68.

^v Earl Kent Brown, *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983), pp. 105, 185-98.

^{vi} Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1985), p. 2.

^{vii} Flora Larsson, *My Best Men Are Women* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1974), pp. 17, 19-22.

^{viii} 1. D. Steward, *The History of the Freewill Baptists*, vol. 1 (Dover, England: Freewill Baptists Printing, 1862), pp. 308-10, 318, 338, 377, 391.

^{ix} Jerena Lee, *Religious Experiences and Journal* (Philadelphia: Self-published, 1849), pp. 14-17.

^x Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1976), pp. 67-68.

Chapter 21 : What Can We Learn from the Role of Women in the Non-Western Church?

Too often when we discuss women's issues—whether in the church, the home or society at large—we think only in terms of our own culture. And when we devise solutions to problems, our approach reflects solely a modern Western perspective. I have to catch myself short in this regard all the time—especially as international students challenge my perspective on a particular issue. But this is not a problem peculiar to me. Western feminists have been guilty of making generalizations and offering solutions that are presumed to suit women in all cultures, and they are discovering that non-Western women will not simply fall in line.

Women in many respects have been the backbone of the non-Western Christian church, and as such they have much to say to Western Christians. Although they have often found themselves in very subservient roles in society and in the home, their Christian faith has liberated them for pivotal roles in ministry.

How has Christianity influenced the role of women in other cultures?

Christianity has had a powerful impact as it has confronted other cultures—and this impact has been felt by women in a particularly remarkable way. In modern oppressive societies women are often treated much as they were in the early nineteenth century when Ann Judson wrote of their plight in Burma, telling of child marriages, female infanticide, and women who were held down by the "tyrannic rod" of their husbands. "The wife receives the appellation of *my servant*, or *my dog*, and is allowed to partake of what her lordly husband is pleased to give her at the conclusion of his repast."^x

One of my favorite stories of how Christianity has powerfully influenced women in other cultures is that of Kana, a woman from Irian Jaya. In the midst of a repressive culture, the gospel had set her free, and she reached out with this freedom to minister to other women, on one occasion speaking before a vast audience at a women's retreat:

"When the gospel came to us Dani people, we were told that the gospel was for the men," she reminded them. "The men said we women did not have souls, so we did not need the gospel message. The men crowded around the speakers of the good news. We women were told to sit out on the edges of the crowd and to keep the children quiet so the men could get all of the profit from the message."

So convinced was she that she wasn't a full human and did not have a soul that she questioned her own reality. "Once I was in a group when a photo was taken by the missionary," she related. "I was so excited I would not wait until the picture had been developed and came back. When word came that the picture had arrived, I elbowed my way through the crowd to see if my face would show up or if, as the men insisted, I would not appear because I was only a spirit." She was ecstatic. "There I was!... I had shown up the same as the men had! I, too, was a real person."^x

Kana's story does not end there. The gospel had made her free, and she realized that this freedom meant responsibility. There were others who had not heard this glorious message, and now she had an obligation to God and to them to share her newfound faith.

What role have Bible women played in world evangelism?

The term "Bible woman" is unfamiliar to most Christians today. Yet Bible women were the backbone of the church in many areas of the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in some areas they continue to play an important role today. Like the indigenous male evangelists, they reached out to their own people, often working closely with missionary women. They were generally more effective in ministry than the missionary, because they knew the language and the culture and were able to go where the missionary was unwelcome. This was true in China, where Rosalind Goforth, a Presbyterian missionary

from Canada, relied heavily on Mrs. Wang, a dedicated Bible woman, to break down barriers that Goforth herself could not have penetrated. In one instance, Mrs. Wang pursued a hostile woman—known as “the Old Autocrat”—who controlled her village's clan, and was able to persuade her to permit the gospel to be preached in her village.

Some Bible women were barely literate and had to rely on memorized passages of Scripture as they preached in the villages. Others, however, were quite well trained. By 1900, there were forty female training schools in China alone, and in India there were more than thirty such schools.

Bible women served in a variety of ministries, including evangelism, medical work, teaching, music and foreign missions. They worked long hours and were often away from home for days and weeks at a time. Yet their pay was barely enough to sustain them. They depended on the hospitality of strangers as they moved from town to town, always facing the threat or the reality of persecution.^x

The ministry of Bible women is foreign to us—truly foreign. Today this ministry continues in many parts of the world, though on a diminishing scale. It is a pattern of ministry that more closely reflects that of the New Testament era than does the type of ministry we are familiar with in the modern Western world. The Bible women's humble, informal style that is characterized more by house churches than multimillion-dollar ministry complexes, and by Bible studies more than thirty-minute, three-point sermons. It is a style that is far more compatible with unpretentious servanthood than with ordained clerics in robes or pin-striped suits.

What can different cultures say to us about women in ministry?

I have often found that missionaries and non-Western Christians have unusually profound insights on Scripture. Because of their experiences in other cultures and their own struggles in cross-cultural communication, they are able to grasp subtle meanings in language or recognize cultural peculiarities more quickly. They are not quite so handicapped by parochialism as most Americans are.

Olive Rogers' insights are an example. Paul's admonitions in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, for women to be silent and to ask their husbands for clarification at home, make much more sense in light of her insights:

When in Old Delhi once, I visited the golden domed temple of the Sikhs. Being a woman, I was taken round to a back entrance and then through several rooms, till I reached the upper gallery where the ladies gathered. I sat on the richly carpeted floor and surveyed the scene. Suddenly, as so often in the East, the Scriptures became alive! We were high above the main body of the temple. The worship—intoning of the Sacred Book, and instructions for salvation—being carried on down below was pertinent only to the men, for they alone have souls to save. I tried in vain to hear what was going on, but the women were sitting around in groups gossiping, amused at the play of their children, careless of the fact that they were in a place of worship. For them a visit to the temple was merely an opportunity to escape from the monotony of an existence behind the four walls of their homes, where they reign supreme in their own quarters, but where their lives seldom encroach upon those of their men-folk, who do all the work involving contact with the outside world.

Not many months later I attended one of the Christian conventions held annually in S. India. Day after day thousands of men and women sat under the large leaf shelter. The men's section of the “pandal” was quiet and orderly as they listened to the Word, taking notes with assiduous care. The women's half was another matter. All the children were there, restless, demanding and noisy, and many of the women were sitting in groups chattering.^x

This picture of worship may be very similar to what Paul confronted as he reached out with the gospel. In many instances, women had not been a vital part of religious worship

and activities, and thus it was difficult for them to fully appreciate at first the freedom that was theirs in Christianity.

Chapter 22 : How Have World Missions Affected Women's Ministries?

The title to this chapter might more appropriately be, "How Have Women's Ministries Affected World Missions?" Each has had a profound effect on the other. Women have made monumental contributions to the efforts of world evangelism. Even those who most strongly defend male headship generally agree with that analysis—with some rare exceptions. John R. Rice, for example, who was in other respects a missions enthusiast, spoke in negative terms of women's involvement—especially when it entailed speaking in churches in the homeland:

The deputation work of great missionary societies has suffered greatly at the hands of women missionaries. If godly, Spirit-filled men, manly men, should go to the churches with the appeal that those whom God has called for his work should come prepared for toil and sweat and blood and tears, it would do infinitely more for the mission cause than the prattle about dress and customs and food, with . . . slide pictures of quaint heathen groups presented so often by women missionaries, largely to groups of women and children. We have debased the cause of foreign missions by not keeping it on the high vigorous plane which the New Testament gives mission work. . . . It violates the command of God for women to speak before mixed audiences of men and women, and to take the pulpit in the churches. And we may be sure that the work of the gospel of Christ among the heathen is not prospered by this sin.^x

Rice's sentiments have clearly not prevailed. Women have had more opportunities for ministry within the mission context than in any other setting. Indeed, it has been under the cover of "mission" that women have been allowed to preach and teach and plant churches all over the world—including North America—and to speak from the pulpit in established churches in their homeland. As far as women have been concerned, mission has been to the modern world what monasticism was to the medieval world—except that mission has provided far more opportunities for proclaiming the gospel to a lost world. Here, outside the official hierarchy of the church, women's ministries have flourished. Women have worked shoulder to shoulder with men in the most difficult and challenging situations, grateful simply for the opportunity to serve.

Why were women initially barred from missionary work?

The answer to that question is simple and straightforward. Women were initially barred from missionary work primarily because of two passages of Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:11-12, which enjoins women not to teach and usurp authority, and 1 Corinthians 14:34, which asks women to be silent. If women could not preach and teach and have authority, so the denominational leaders reasoned, how could they be missionaries? So for the first several decades of the modern missionary movement, women were barred from serving as missionaries. They could be missionary wives or they could function in support capacities on the home front, but they could not actually be missionaries themselves. Married women served alongside their husbands, but single women were forced to marry or to stay home.

The "call" of God, however, was stronger than the opposition from men, and during the last four decades of the nineteenth century, single women began going abroad as missionaries without the blessing of the church. Yet they were not without strong male supporters. Men such as J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, and Fredrik Franson, founder of TEAM (The Evangelical Alliance Mission), recognized that the unfinished task of world evangelization was far too enormous for men alone to accomplish. "We face the circumstance," wrote Franson in 1897, "that the devil, fortunately for him, has been able to exclude nearly two-thirds of the number of Christians from participation in the

Lord's service through evangelization. The loss for God's cause is so great that it can hardly be described." Franson's logic was powerful and helped turn the tide in favor of women in mission:

It is amazing how one can get such a false idea that not all God's children should use all their powers in all ways to save the lost world. There are, so to speak, many people in the water about to drown. A few men are trying to save them, and that is considered well and good. But look, over there a few women have untied a boat also to be of help in the rescue, and immediately a few men cry out; standing there idly looking on and therefore having plenty of time to cry out: 'No, no, women must not help, rather let the people drown.' What stupidity.^x

What is the significance of the women's missionary movement?

The women's missionary movement began around 1860, when women began establishing societies to sponsor and support single women as missionaries. Married women had served faithfully as missionary wives, and in many instances their accomplishments had been remarkable. Ann Judson, for example, conducted evangelistic work among the Burmese people while translating portions of Scripture into Thai. But, like that of other missionary wives, her ministry was limited in its duration. Most married women were so involved with domestic cares and having babies that their mission work was severely restricted. If they survived a dozen years they were fortunate. After Ann Judson died, her husband married twice more. One missionary to China buried seven wives there.

The urgent needs in world mission, then, more than any other factor, thrust single women into the forefront of the missionary enterprise. The impetus actually came from a man, David Abeel, an ordained minister from the Reformed Church in America who was serving as a missionary in China. He recognized the need for women missionaries who could devote their entire lives to ministry, and he challenged women in his denomination to respond.

The response, however, did not come until more than two decades later, in 1861, when Sarah Doremus, who had been deeply involved in urban ministries, organized the Woman's Union Missionary Society. The word *union* was very significant. She herself was Reformed, but the founding committee was made of women from other denominations, and the first woman commissioned for service was a Baptist. In the years that followed more "female agencies" were founded; by the turn of the century the number had reached forty, and the women's missionary movement was on its way to becoming the largest organized women's movement ever.^x The women's missionary movement was unique in that for the first time in history women could take up leadership positions in evangelistic outreach on a large scale. Women in monasticism did not have any such autonomy; they were strictly limited by the Roman Catholic church. In most instances the women's mission organizations were independent of outside control, and their united efforts gave them remarkable strength in numbers. The Central Committee for the United Study of Foreign Missions published millions of textbooks and sponsored summer schools for missions studies that attracted thousands of women.

In assessing the whole movement in 1910, Helen Barrett Montgomery wrote: "It is indeed a wonderful story We began in weakness, we stand in power. In 1861 there was a single missionary in the field, Miss Marston, in Burma; in 1909, there were 4710 unmarried women in the field Then the supporters numbered a few hundreds; today there are at least two millions."^x

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the heyday of the women's missionary movement had passed. Denominational boards were now accepting single women as missionaries, and the women's societies began merging with the denominational boards. The result was a major loss of power and influence once wielded by women.

Mission textbooks have by and large failed to recognize this powerful arm of the modern missionary movement. Indeed, some books fail to mention it at all, while emphasizing other movements of far less consequence. The women's missionary movement

is part of our religious heritage—one that offers many challenges for both women and men today.

Was the women's missionary movement a feminist movement?

This question would not even be posed had not a major book on the subject by R. Pierce Beaver been published under the title *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America*. Most people would not associate feminism with missions, but the term feminist is used in different ways by different people. If, in using the term, Beaver meant that women took charge of their destinies and vowed to enter the missionary enterprise despite gender barriers, his case is well founded. But if the term is used in a broader and more general sense to describe a women's "rights" effort, the women's missionary movement could hardly be described as feminist.

Beaver says that in response to the intransigence of male mission leaders, "the women revolted and formed the first women's board."^x His own evidence, however, offers very little indication of a revolt. Time and again women deferred plans to organize mission agencies or to expand their outreach because of male opposition. Had their spirit been one of revolution, they would have been less sensitive to the fact that their mission work was perceived as a threat to the male establishment.

Jane Hunter, author of an important study on women missionaries published by Yale University Press, takes issue with those who would argue that these women had feminist inclinations: "For feminism to have gained a foothold among the women's missionary community would have entailed the replacement of the underlying premise of women's mission work, self-denial, with its opposite, self-advocacy."^x

Elisabeth Elliot has taken the argument a step further, suggesting that missionary women did not need to demand equal rights because of the opportunities they already had in mission work: "Today strident female voices are raised, shrilly and ad nauseam, to remind us that women are equal with men. But such a question has never even arisen in connection with the history of Christian missions. In fact, for many years, far from being excluded, women constituted the majority of foreign missionaries."^x

Elliot is wrong both in her logic and her facts. That women were in the majority does not mean they enjoyed equality. Moreover, women missionaries did raise the question of equality. Lottie Moon, the most celebrated Southern Baptist missionary, is a prime example. "What women want who come to China is free opportunity to do the largest possible work," she wrote. "What women have a right to demand is perfect equality."^x

Despite her rhetoric, however, Moon was not incited by feminism. Motivation is a key issue here. She and women missionaries generally were motivated by the needs of others rather than their own. They may have looked and acted very much like feminists when they launched the women's missionary movement in 1861, and when they individually fought for ministry opportunities equal to men's, but beneath the surface the issues were very different.

Why are women permitted more latitude overseas than at home?

The initial opposition to women's serving alongside men in mission faded by the early twentieth century. Indeed, virtually all mission boards were accepting single women as candidates. This was not because church leaders had re-examined Scripture and determined that women could rightly preach and teach; it was more a matter of pragmatism. Women had determined that they would serve in mission, and there was very little that denominational board leaders could do but accept that fact.

Leaders of independent faith-mission boards had long since accepted women. The situation was similar to the one that has prevailed in sectarian movements: evangelism was first and foremost in their minds. Few of these mission leaders even contemplated the inconsistency of denying women ministry in their homeland while encouraging such ministry abroad.

This inconsistency was easily tolerated, because at a distance of thousands of miles women were out of sight and out of mind, and thus could be dismissed by church leaders. Besides, they were teaching and preaching to "natives," not real men—so went the understood rationale. This division between preaching in the homeland and preaching on the mission field has been largely taken for granted and continues today—though in some instances evangelical mission boards have curtailed women's missionary activities in recent years as a result of the backlash against feminism. In most cases, however, women still have far more freedom in foreign settings, with little opposition from those who perceive themselves as traditionalists.

In fact, traditionalists often encourage women to pursue roles overseas that they are denied at home. A student of mine not long ago told me that she had talked with another seminary professor about a ministry of teaching theology on the Bible-college level. He told her that such a role was not proper for a woman, but then went on to encourage her to continue her studies and pursue the same ministry in missions—where presumably she would be teaching "natives."

The distinction between "natives" and "men" was brought home to me some years ago. I was talking to a man who was associated with the Plymouth Brethren—a religious movement that has been known for severely restricting women's roles. I commented to him that in the past Plymouth Brethren women had had ministries teaching men, and I mentioned Florence Young, who had taught thousands of men in her Bible studies. He was certain that I was mistaking the Plymouth Brethren for some other group of Brethren. I insisted otherwise, giving him further details of her ministry in the Solomon Islands. With that geographical revelation, he reacted with sudden comprehension—"Oh, you mean she taught natives?"

That explained it. She was not teaching "men" after all.

^x John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* (Murfreesboro, Tenn.: Sword of the Lord, 1941), pp. 63-64.

^x Ruth A. Tucker, *Guardians of the Great Commission: The Story of Women in Modern Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988), p. 97.

^x Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), pp. 300-301.

^x Helen Barren Montgomery, *Western Women in Eastern Lands* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 243-44.

^x R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 63.

^x Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 88.

^x Elisabeth Elliot Leitch, "The Place of Women in World Missions," in *Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe*, Hope of the World, eds. David M. Howard (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1974), pp. 123-29.

^x Tucker, *Guardians of the Great Commission*, p. 41

Chapter 23 : Have Women Made Gains in the Church in the Twentieth Century?

The role of women in the church in the twentieth century will perplex future historians. On the surface it will appear as though women made great gains—as though the closed doors of the early decades had been opened wide by the final decades of the century. Where once women could not even cast a vote in a church meeting, they had come to the point of leading the meetings, and no office or position was denied them. But those historians who dig deeper will discover that the mainline churches that were offering women the greatest opportunities were simultaneously declining in membership and influence. Some of these churches, which once had stood firm on the historic orthodox faith, were becoming too sophisticated to take the Bible at face value. The gains that have been made, then, are mixed at best.

And historians will find that the story has been entirely different among the more conservative churches. At the turn of the century, these denominations had little influence and were generally scorned by outsiders. In these circles, however, women had much

greater opportunity for ministry. This was the era of the internationally acclaimed Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army, and of the well-known Pentecostal leaders, including the celebrated Aimee Semple McPherson. And even in tiny fundamentalist and holiness denominations, women were ordained as evangelists and preachers.

But as the decades marched on, the opportunities for women declined—at the very time that these denominations were gaining respectability and influence. Indeed, by the end of the century, as evangelicals of all stripes were dominating the religious scene, a conservative reaction had set in, denying women the ministries they had once so freely enjoyed.

How did leaders of the Social Gospel view women's issues?

One of the most prominent religious developments of the early twentieth century was the Social Gospel movement—a movement that is typically associated with mainline denominations. Among the best-known leaders were Walter Rauschenbusch, Washington Gladden and Lyman Abbot.

True to their more liberal mainline denominational associations, these men were not supporters of women in ministry. Rauschenbusch, who is frequently referred to as the “father of the Social Gospel in America,” praised women for their emotional sensitivity but also insisted that it was a liability in that it could “warp her judgment and make her less safe for teaching and administration.”^x Women served at the grass-roots level of the Social Gospel movement—but not in leadership roles, except where more conservative evangelicals were prominent.

The Social Gospel in its broadest sense was a diverse movement that spanned the entire religious spectrum. Most historical analysis has been applied to the more liberal elements, but that is changing since the publication of *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* by Norris Magnuson. Magnuson points out that some of the most effective social work among prisoners and the unemployed and homeless was conducted by deeply committed evangelicals, working with such organizations as the Salvation Army, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Volunteers of America and inner-city missions. And true to the evangelical heritage, women were prominent not only at the grass-roots level but also in leadership positions.

Among the women wielding powerful influence among the evangelicals were Catherine Booth, Phoebe Palmer and Frances Willard, as well as many lesser-known women who directed the work in rescue missions. These women, according to Magnuson, were “liberated” women of their day, and they and their male co-workers generally supported suffrage, the “feminist” issue of the day.^x

What was the women's role in the rise of the Pentecostal movement?

Like many other so-called sectarian movements in past history, the Pentecostal movement seemed to be custom-made for women with a call to ministry. The emphasis on spontaneous charismatic experiences did not easily allow for gender distinctions. Women could hear the voice of God with just as much certainty as could men. And with the conviction that they were propelled by the power of the Holy Ghost, they preached with as much might as did the Spirit-filled brethren. In that sense, Pentecostalism was an equal opportunity employer.

Indeed, it was the testimony of a woman that launched the Pentecostal movement into the twentieth century. The setting was the Bethel Bible School, near Topeka, Kansas. “It was after midnight and the first day of the twentieth century when Miss [Agnes] Ozman began ‘speaking in the Chinese language’ while a ‘halo seemed to surround her head and face.’”^x This midnight prayer meeting was the precursor to the Azusa Street Revival that began in 1906.

Most Pentecostals today would concede that there were many excesses in the early years, and it is not my purpose here to evaluate the movement. But it should be noted that

women were in the forefront of this movement, which has since spread worldwide in an amazing demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit. They served as denominational leaders, preachers, evangelists, Bible-school teachers and missionaries with freedom not previously experienced, except in smaller movements such as the Quakers. Few would argue that in some instances women Pentecostal leaders became consumed with their own grandeur. Aimee Semple McPherson, one of the most celebrated evangelists in the early decades of the twentieth century, is an easy target in this regard. She was a crowd-pleaser who played up to her audiences with a dramatic flair, never seeming too concerned that her eccentricities might demean the cause of Christ. Nor was she particularly careful about her personal life: she left her first husband to go on the road as an itinerant evangelist, later remarried, and finally claimed to have been kidnapped—a story challenged by reporters, who insisted that she was hiding out with another man.

Yet, when she died, McPherson left behind the Fourquare Gospel church—a denomination that has been very active in mission at home and abroad—and she also left behind many converts who had found Christ through her ministry. She cannot be excused for apparent moral lapses or for the flamboyance that may have discredited the gospel, but her ministry does demonstrate the power of God that often prevails despite sin and failure.

How has the women’s movement affected Catholic women in recent decades?

Despite the Roman Catholic church’s official teaching that women may not be priest or carry out the functions of priests, the actual practice of the church is not so cut and dried. Women have circumvented such obstacles since medieval times, and they continue to do so today. Due to a shortage of priests in recent decades, nuns have often been the only resident spiritual leaders available to the laity. This is particularly true in Latin America and other areas of the Third World, but it is also true in North America, as Tony Campolo relates:

Recently I spent some time with a Roman Catholic bishop who explained to me how women had been a godsend to many of the churches in his diocese which lacked priestly leadership. He explained that nuns were serving as the pastors for many of his rural congregations, although the people did not actually call them pastors. These nuns visited the sick, taught the catechism, preached the homilies, and even served Holy Communion. He explained that once a month, he or one of his auxiliary bishops would visit each of these female-led parishes, perform the mass, and sanctify the bread and wine. These "sanctified elements" would then be stored until worship time, when they would be given to communicants by the nuns. When I pointed out that these nuns did everything that priests do and therefore should be ordained, he agreed. Then he added, "Most people in these parishes would also agree, but you know how the church is." Indeed I do.^x

The Roman Catholic church, more than any other religious body, contains a wide diversity of opinion on the issue of women's roles. Because of splintering, individual Protestant denominations are far less diverse. If a particular Presbyterian body's stance on women's issues, for example, does not suit someone's tastes, there are many others from which to choose. Not so for Catholics. Within this one church we find extreme traditionalism and extreme feminism.

William Marra, a Catholic theologian and philosopher who teaches at Fordham University, argues that a woman's place is in the home and that any woman who wants a career should remain "celibate." He represents a wing of the church—which includes the pope and other high officials—that strongly opposes women in office, while most of the laity would be more moderate or feminist in their orientation.

At the other extreme of Catholic belief are feminist theologians who regard the Bible as a book that is tainted with sexism. The most widely recognized Catholic feminist is Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the author of *In Memory of Her. A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. While she continues to view the Bible as Christian revelation, she qualifies its validity: "Biblical revelation and truth are given only in those texts

and interpretive modes that transcend critically their patriarchal frameworks and allow for a vision of Christian women as historical and theological subjects and actors.”^x

What is the status of women in mainline churches?

The situation today in most mainline denominations is significantly different for women from what it is within Roman Catholicism—although the changes did not come without bitter conflict. The Anglican church and its American counterpart, the Episcopal church, are striking examples. In less than two decades Episcopal women have gone from being barred from the priesthood to being consecrated bishop, as Barbara Harris has been. And today, for the first time in history, the head of the Anglican church, Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, affirms women in the priesthood.

Interestingly, the events of recent years have erupted in stark contrast to the prevailing conditions in mainline denominations in past generations, when restrictions on women's ministry were more severe than they were in evangelical circles. Indeed, during a time when many mainline churches were drifting into liberalism and modernism, women continued to be shut out of ordained ministry. Biblical and historical arguments were marshaled in support of male supremacy, while many cynically suggested that the opposition was more a matter of power than a matter of orthodoxy.

By the 1960s and 1970s, however, most mainline bodies, including the Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran, United Church of Christ, and Disciples of Christ parent denominations, had renounced gender barriers affecting women, and women were finding their way into the highest levels of church leadership. The rationale was fairness and feminism—very often with little emphasis on scriptural support. The effects of higher criticism had shaken the belief in an authoritative Bible, and in the minds of many a biblical basis for ministry was not essential.

Many feminists in mainline liberal churches argue that the Bible—and particularly the writing of Paul—has been the source of the problem for women. They insist that both Old and New Testaments must be stripped of patriarchy before their teachings can be applied to the contemporary church. In that sense they differ from evangelical feminists, who argue that through Christ women are beyond the curse and that the teachings on women in the Gospels and the Epistles have been misinterpreted to wrongfully restrict women.

It is important to point out, however, that there are many evangelical women involved in ministry in mainline churches—women who have been nurtured in an evangelical faith or who have rediscovered their evangelical roots. Other women have sought out mainline denominations because they have been denied ordination by their own denominations. In many cases these women are having a very positive impact on their churches. I know of one woman who was called to be the senior pastor of a liberal church partly on the basis of her gender. Not only was she deemed an excellent preacher, but she offered the church an opportunity to atone for its sex bias of the past. But as soon as her ministry began, the church realized that it had gotten more than just a woman preacher. She was thoroughly evangelical, and during her tenure she led the church back to its evangelical roots. Her story is one that can be repeated again and again as women reaffirm their Christian heritage and accept the challenges that await them in mainline denominations.

²³ Quoted in Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), p. 375.

²⁴ Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work, 1865-1920* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1990), pp. 112-17.

²⁵ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 101.

²⁶ Tony Campolo, *Twenty Hot Potatoes Christians Are Afraid to Touch* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), p. 41.

²⁷ Elisabeth Schfssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 30.