

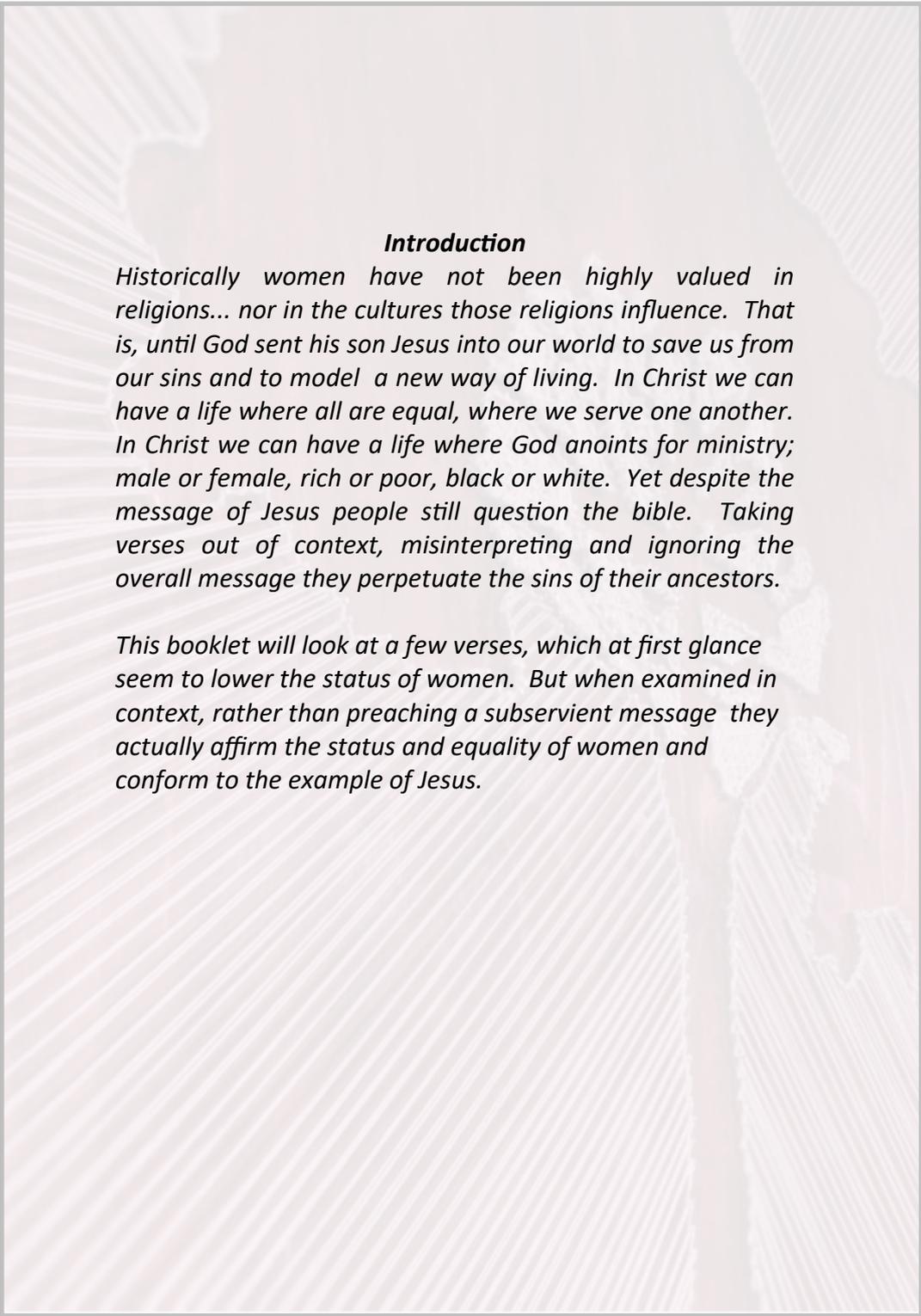
What the bible

Really

says about

Equality

By Pastor Dean Moore



Introduction

Historically women have not been highly valued in religions... nor in the cultures those religions influence. That is, until God sent his son Jesus into our world to save us from our sins and to model a new way of living. In Christ we can have a life where all are equal, where we serve one another. In Christ we can have a life where God anoints for ministry; male or female, rich or poor, black or white. Yet despite the message of Jesus people still question the bible. Taking verses out of context, misinterpreting and ignoring the overall message they perpetuate the sins of their ancestors.

This booklet will look at a few verses, which at first glance seem to lower the status of women. But when examined in context, rather than preaching a subservient message they actually affirm the status and equality of women and conform to the example of Jesus.

Chapter 1

As I write, Tuesday just gone, was International Women's Day. A day set aside to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women. It was also a day designed to make people aware that gender parity has not only slowed but significantly regressed in many places across the world. Sadly I feel this to be true for the Church here in Australia. I am a passionate believer in the Church and the bible and I believe the Church should be leading this message, because equality is a key message of the bible and a byproduct of the gospel. Jesus makes us right with God and with each other and that "each other," includes equality. So I am hoping in this short book, in some small way, will shine a spotlight on the bible and the message of equality that can only come to the world through Jesus.

One of the most misinterpreted and misunderstood passages in the bible is Ephesians 5:22, which says; "**Wives, submit to your husbands**". You see verse 22 might at a superficial level encourage gender disparity, the reality is, when you look at the passage as a whole, it makes far more sense to summarise the apostles message as a call to mutual submission. And this makes sense for a number of reasons.

Firstly this passage begins at verse 21 which says : **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**. That's the opening statement? There is absolutely no getting away from that. Anything that follows must be building on that opening statement. Anything that follows must be read with the view that what is about to follow is building on or applying in some way the call to submit to one another.

The second reason is that the whole of Ephesians, as is the case in Paul's other letters, champion the cause of equality. 1:10 "**according to his good pleasure, he purposed in Christ to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth.**" To breakdown the "**dividing walls of hostility**" in chapter 2, And in v15 "**his purpose was to create in himself one new humanity**", it goes on to say "**one body**", "**one church**" and then in chapter 3 "**one family**". And if those verses aren't specific enough Galatians 3:23 "**There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus**".

Now where did Paul get this idea of equality? Well let me assure you he didn't get it from the society he lived in, there was very little gender equality in the Greco/Roman world and he especially didn't get it from Judaism because Judaism was worse.

According to rabbinic customs women were; not allowed to study the Scriptures (Torah), were greatly restricted in public prayer, were not counted when determining the number necessary for a quorum to form a congregation to worship communally, were separated in the synagogues from men, were not allowed to read aloud or take any leading function in worship, could be divorced for the flimsiest of reasons and were not allowed to bear witness in a court of law. Devout Jewish men were encouraged to pray daily and they were encouraged to pray this threefold thanksgiving: "Praised be God that he has not created me a gentile; praised be God that he has not created me a woman; praised be God that he has not created me an ignorant man."

So where did Paul get his commitment to equality from? He got it from Jesus. In sharp contrast Jesus did not differentiate in his preaching between men and women; women were to hear the word of God; experience healing and salvation in all its forms. Luke 8 says; "After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, and also some women..." . It was women whom God chose to be the first to bear testimony to Christ's resurrection and remember that was at a time when a woman's testimony was inadmissible in a court of law. It was upon the testimony of women that the proclamation of the resurrection depended. This equal call to discipleship is also reflected in the fact that the gift of prophecy was given to both male and female disciples (Acts 2:17).

Following the death of Jesus, the early Christian Church continued to live out Jesus' example of equality of mutual submission. In Romans 16:1-15, Paul lists a number of Church leaders some of those were women, he refers to Phoebe, as a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae; he refers to a married couple, Priscilla and her husband Aquila as his "fellow workers in Christ. This couple is mentioned seven times in four different books of the New Testament. They are always named *as a couple* and of those seven references, Priscilla's name is mentioned first on five occasions, which is conspicuously unusual for such a male-dominant society. The list goes on and on, in Romans 16:7, he refers to a male apostle, Andronicus and a female apostle, Junia, as "outstanding among the apostles " see the equality, see the oneness, see the mutual submission in action?

When I was in Ephesus a few years ago I was given the privilege of trekking up the mountain that overlooked Ephesus to view a secret cave. It pays to be friends with Ben Witherington one of the leading New Testament scholars of our day, you get to see a lot of things not open to the general public. This cave belonged to the church of Ephesus circa 200 AD.

It was built by the Ephesus church probably to provide a safe and secret place of worship. The cave is full of beautiful fresco's- paintings by the early Christians and one of the most interesting is a painting of the Apostle Paul and of Thecla. Thecla is said to have been a female companion of Paul and then later a respected preacher and leader of the Church. The painting shows her side by side with Paul and she is pictured in the preaching pose. You will notice that her eyes have been gauged out probably done by iconoclasts during the Byzantium era (500-600AD). It's important to note that by 500AD the church had begun to deify its historic leaders and the iconoclasts were reacting to that. But like most "reactions" sometimes the baby is thrown out with the bath water, and the Christian life of equality reverted back to its unchristian unequal past.

When I first started out as a pastor I was assigned to a church where women could do nothing in the church unless they were submitted to the headship of a male. It was the most ridiculous situation, in most cases these women were more mature and more gifted than the men, but they had to have a man over them, they had to be "submitted" to a man. When I expressed my concerns, suggesting they may be misinterpreting the scriptures, I was accused of cow tailing to the world rather than to scripture. I was shocked and deeply offended. I'm a man of the word, I'm a bible teacher, I'm a follower of Jesus and they were accusing me of being worldly; bringing in ideas of equality based on the worlds ideas. What? NO!

My friends, equality and mutual submission is not the worlds idea, it's God's idea! Don't you hate it when great and wonderful things are hijacked by the world. Education for all came from the Church. Medicine for all, came from the Church. It was out of a sense of calling that Christians fought for insurance and the abolition of slavery, the list goes on and on. Equality was first modeled and championed by Christians, not the world. Somewhere along the way Christians have forgotten their history, and made a mockery of the gospel by the oppression and subjugation of women.

So why does the apostle tell wives to submit and husbands to love? This has been the subject of much discussion and countless hypotheses over the years.

And I'd love to deal with all the possible explanations but in the interests of time, I'll cut to the chase. So why does the apostle tell wives to submit and husbands to love? This has been the subject of much discussion and countless hypotheses over the years. And I'd love to deal with all the possible explanations but in the interests of time, I'll cut to the chase.

The Greco/Roman world in the first century was a harsh place, there was no sense of equality, it was all about authority and power. And the extent of that authority and power was determined by your gender and your nationality. If you were a Male and a Roman Citizen you were by law and culture someone with authority. Christianity was to play a major role in planting the seeds of change in the ancient world by example and unreserved commitment to Christ. Those seeds would eventually give fruit to the equality we are working towards today. But when Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 verse 21 **submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**, that command would not have been met with cheers, it would have been met with either hostile retorts or questions like "please explain?". People would have said; "hang on, that doesn't make sense, if we all submit to one another there will be anarchy, how will society function if we submit to our wives, children and slaves? It just won't work".

It's only been in these last 30-40yrs that we have come to dispel the fear that prompted that question. Today we live in a world where we have come to realize that anarchy won't break out if we embrace equality, the sky won't fall in. Historically, the abolitionists dealt with the same fear, slavery was deemed an impossibility right up to the mid 1800s. We have, by and large, come to accept the equality between black and white, it's time we come to accept the equality between male and female and its especially time we Christians led that call.

So in the first century the Apostle Paul needed to tread very carefully otherwise his message would have been completely thrown out and discounted before it had a chance. So what he does is he uses a language that is acceptable and that language is the language and example of Jesus. **He says husbands love your wives as Jesus loved the church.**

Jesus is the perfect example of one who submits. In fact this was a key message in the early church. One of the oldest creeds of the early church, which was quite possibly a song sung when they gathered for Sunday Services, is recorded in Philippians chapter 2;

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Jesus having absolute power, laid it all aside and submitted himself to the Father and because of that - to us. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane “not my will be done but yours”.

It's important we spend some time considering this, we need to get a clear understanding of who Jesus is. Colossians 1:16 captures Jesus in all his magnificence. **For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him.** That's the real Jesus. Yet Philippians 2:6 tells us he laid that aside and submitted himself to the Father's will and became obedient to death - even death on a cross. And I think it's important to note that Jesus continues to serve us doesn't he? He is not only the object of our worship, our Lord and our king but he serves us as well. He is the head of the Church we look to him for direction in all things yet he cares for us in the most loving and sacrificial ways. When we are down and wallowing in our sin, Jesus is sitting with us. He ministers to us when everyone else has abandoned us.

So as we read in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 25 there is a call for husbands to love their wives in the same way as Jesus loves the Church.

“husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” : Jesus wants his church to grow and thrive. He wants his church to grow in gifts and talents, he wants his church to grow in knowledge and understanding, he wants his church to achieve great and wonderful things. And husbands that's what it means to love your wife as Christ loved the church. We should encourage and facilitate our wife to study and grow in every area of her life, just as the Holy Spirit fans into flame the gifts and talents in us we should do the same for our wife and our children. Our desire for our wife should be the same as

Christ's desire for his church and that is; to become all that she can be.

There are many countries in the world who do not want this way of equality, and of mutual submission. Islam for example will not recognize mutual submission. Fundamental muslims will even go to extreme lengths to force their oppressive beliefs on others. Remember Malala the girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban. There are people in the world who do not want equal rights for women, who do not want freedom for them and do not want them to succeed on a level playing field with men. As the world embraces once again these ancient ways let's remember our Christian history; Christianity thrived because in Christ **"there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"**.

And finally Paul calls husbands to love their wife as their own bodies (v28). The very first marriage ceremony ever performed was done by God Himself. Genesis 2:23-24:

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

The fact that Adam said "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is important. That means when she feels pain, then he should feel it. When the wife rejoices, then the husband should rejoice. They are sharing everything in life; the ups and the downs.

Paul goes on to remind husbands that we are quick to satisfy our own need for nourishment. We rarely neglect our own bodies. Our care for our wife's needs should be just as acute. We are to labor to provide nourishment for her body, and we are to strive to provide nourishment for her soul.

So what does all this look like? It looks like equality, but it's much more than secular equality its Christian equality, which means it is equal submission - mutual submission. In Jesus we are called to submit to one another, in humility and service. It is what Christ has saved us for.

Chapter 2

At Bible college, as we wrestled with the gospel message of Jesus, His inclusion of women in His new kingdom and His purpose for women in His redeemed world, the word “complementarianism” seemed to offer conservative Christians an answer. Here was a word that described how men and women were equal yet distinct, same value, different roles, same inherent worth, different expression. It came across a simple answer to a complex question. But under scrutiny simple answers rarely hold water, they often reveal holes and mask an ugly face.

Complementarianism is a pretty, but false mask, hiding the old face of inequality and the subjugation of women. The reality is, gifted and anointed women continue to be ignored and passed over, based on nothing more than – they are women and it’s not their job. Even gifted women, who clearly have the hand of Jesus on them are told “this is not a woman’s role”.

In an article bravely submitted by Krish Kandiah I was shocked to read a statement from the Gospel Coalition’s founding document. A very clear statement concerning the distinctive roles of men and women in Church and home:

God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

As Krish points out, it is quite remarkable that a coalition of Christian believers, committed to the Bible and the gospel of Jesus, would have as one of its core beliefs, such an unbiblical and un-gospel like statement; The ideas that a. the man was created first, so is the leader. b. The woman came from the man and is named helper, so is a follower. c. The man ‘named’ the woman and so has authority over her, is not only poor exegesis but totally ignores the redemptive work of Christ. Rather than inequality being grounded in redemption, as the Gospel Coalition’s founding document asserts, surely the

opposite is true, surely the redemptive work of Christ and the gospel message would look more like equality than the ongoing promotion of inequality.

But how does this equality thing actually work out in practice? This is the often-posed question. The answer is, Life in Jesus means, Jesus gets to choose, Jesus anoints and equips and He is not constrained by the colour of skin, nationality, previous vocation, the amount of money a person might have or whether they are male or female. In Church, home or work place, Jesus rules, to His rules. Certainly it is a biblical truth that God ordains leaders and leaders lead but those leaders, whoever they are, whether they be male or female should be seeking Christ in all things.

It has often been pointed out that men and women are physically and emotionally different so are more suited to different roles. Of course! Generally speaking men are more aggressive, are physically more suited to certain jobs etc, etc. Women are gentler, and more caring etc, etc. But this difference should not be enshrined in law, a general principle is exactly that, it's certainly not a theological dogma and should never become a creed or statement of belief. But perhaps the most disturbing thing is a few biblical verses have been poorly exegeted, have been made to say things that are incorrect and have somehow been given the power to trump the scriptures as a whole. Three problematic verses the first one has been dealt with two remain.

Chapter 3

In 1998 the Baptist Assembly of NSW and ACT voted to allow each congregation to decide as to its own view concerning the ordination of women, the reason? Because after much debate and close scrutiny of the scriptures it was agreed that the Scriptures do not have a clear cut answer on this issue. At first glance it would seem at least two passages do exclude women, however, at first glance the bible would seem to endorse slavery, genocide and more. As mature Christians we are called to examine carefully and adhere faithfully to the scriptures and this is what I want to do in this chapter.

But first, it needs to be acknowledged that a lot of unkind and unhelpful things have been said during the course of this debate concerning those who hold differing opinions. Some have said the debate has come about because of the influence of secular feminism, not true! Arguably the early church had a much higher view of women and historically we know of many denominations who have grappled with this; the Wesleyan and holiness movements, for example, have been debating this issue well before feminism came into existence.

Some have also said the Bible's authority is undermined if we accept women into leadership, not true! I believe the bible is our authority; the inspired word of God. I work hard at understanding it and whether easy or hard I will obey it. And after careful examination I have come to the conclusion that verses which appear at first glance, to exclude women actually affirm them.

Let's start with, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,

As in all the congregations of the saints,³⁴ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.³⁶ Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?³⁷ If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.³⁸ If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.³⁹ Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. (NIV)

To start off we need to understand why this letter was written and how it is laid out. This is essential to understanding its meaning and the message the apostle wants to convey. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians when he was working in Ephesus in response to two things—a letter from the Corinthian church with specific

questions (ch7:1 “**Now for the matters you wrote about**”) and reports from “Chloe’s people” who had come to visit him (ch1:11 “**some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you.**”). That original letter has not been preserved. If it had been, it would make it a lot easier for us to work out when he was responding to Chloe’s people, when he was responding to ‘the letter’ and when he was telling us something with no reference to either a letter or a conversation. Nevertheless with careful reading we can make an intelligent assessment: Chapters 1 through 4 the Apostle Paul is mainly writing about his ministry, reproof, his visit, explanations, and Timothy. In chapters 5 through 6 he writes concerning things he heard were going on in the church at Corinth. And in chapters 7 through 14, Paul was responding to questions and statements that the Corinthians wrote to him. Let's take a look:

1 Corinthians 7:1 **¹Now for the matters you wrote about:**

1 Corinthians 8:1 **¹Now about food sacrificed to idols:**

1 Corinthians 12:1 **¹Now about spiritual gifts,**

In 1 Corinthians 12:1 Paul finally gets to the questions and matters about spiritual gifts, that is those issues concerning spiritual gifts, which they had mentioned in their letter. We don’t know exactly what their problem was but Paul goes out of his way in chapter 12 to tell them that all the spiritual gifts were given to all. Paul says in verse 7: “**But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one** (ἕκαστος, hekastos, each and every one) **for the good of all.** Hekastos means men and women, slave or free, black or white. God gives all the gifts to --not only males, but both genders. The word "all" in the Greek means ALL, not half, not a certain few, not just males, but ALL!

So here is the reason for the apparent contradiction in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (**³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says**), : Those statements in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 never originated with Paul. Paul only reiterated them as a rebuke to the Corinthian Church. The Corinthians originally wrote those words in the letter they sent to Paul. Paul lifted it out and placed it in his letter after his teaching on spiritual gifts to highlight how wrong they were concerning their exclusion of women. Paul’s intention is to show them how absurd it was for them to say that the Law commands women to be silent in the church - they are the church.

Dr. Ben Witherington III underscores this further by pointing out a second Corinthian error which is seen in verse 34. Scholars have often pondered what

in the world Paul is referring to when he says “*as the law says*”. It says in verse 34 women should stay silent, not allowed to speak and stay in submission “*as the law says*”. Where exactly does the Old Testament law say that? The answer is; nowhere! On both accounts Paul is incredulous, that is why he responds in verse 36 with much sarcasm.

Paul responds to the Corinthian letter with its so called Old Testament claims with the sarcastic question: *³⁶Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?* (v36). The Kings James version (of v36) captures the Apostles intention beautifully with one single word: *What?* In the Greek, the word has a negative disclaimer. We could say, “**What, are you nuts?**” Paul said, *“What? Came the word of God out from you? Or did it come unto you only?”* (v36). Whichever way you translate the Greek the intention is clear enough, that is, the previous statement that he lifted from the letter he received from them referring that women are to keep silent in the church was **not from God at all**. In fact, it was pure silliness. Paul has just finished writing in a few paragraphs before this in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 establishing that when women prophesy, teach or speak in the church they are to have their heads covered. *And as we have already established in chapter 12 he says all the spiritual gifts are given to all.*

Paul goes on to say, *³⁷If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.* In other words; *THE THINGS THAT I WRITE TO YOU ARE THE COMMANDS OF THE LORD, (NOT THE THINGS THAT YOU WRITE)*” (1 Co.14:37). Paul was saying that he was appointed to write the Scriptures and the commands of God, not the Corinthian leaders.

Finally Paul closes the subject by saying *³⁹Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.* The word “brothers’ in the Greek does not mean male, it means 'born out of the womb of God, born again' --- males and females). In other words the issue is not women in leadership the issue is orderly worship. The services in the Corinthian church were disorderly, damaging and dishonouring to God. Some wanted to bring them back into line by banning the women from using their gifts but Paul says no! It is not an issue of women in leadership, it is an issue of orderly worship. Gifts are to be used in a fitting and orderly way.

I guess some may read this commentary of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and say “surely if what you say is true the apostle would have expressed this more clearly”? Scholarship, such as the work being done by Ben Witherington and others, is showing that first century writers used first century rhetorical methods to argue their case. From our 21st century perspective it is difficult and clumsy but for them in their time it was clear and scholarly. As we come to terms with the way they wrote, we come to understand exactly their intent and the difficult, seemingly contradictory, passages such as 1 Cor.14:34-35 find their true meaning and consistency with the whole of scripture.

Before we end this subject, we need to mention one last Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:11-15. I think everyone will agree that, of the passages which appear to restrict women in ministry, this one is the most problematic. Like 1 Cor.14:34-35 at first glance 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is an absolute ban on women being involved in teaching or leadership, however, is this really what Paul has in mind? Again on closer inspection a lot of doubt is cast on a traditional interpretation.

The oft-quoted verse is verse 12, but we should quote all of verses 8-15 to see the context. (NIV):

8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.15 But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

There are a number of unusual features of the passage which must cause us to question the ban on women in leadership interpretation. First, it is curious that Paul prefaces his command (in verse 12) with '**I do not permit...**'. He does not say 'A woman must not teach...', but, 'I do not permit a woman to teach...'. Could it be that Paul was simply giving a personal command to a specific situation?

It is sometimes argued that, since Paul was writing under God's inspiration, that his command is identical to God's command. But it's not that simple. Paul is careful with his words. He only says 'I' if there is a reason. A clear example of

this is seen in 1 Corinthians 7:10 ¹⁰*To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord):* ¹²*To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord):* and 1 Corinthians 7:26 *I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.* ²⁷*Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife.* Clearly verse 27 is not a God given command for single people to remain single. No! It's Paul's preference and he makes sure his readers know it's his preference by saying "I think". So as we look through 1 Timothy (1:3, 1:18, 2:1, 2:8, 2:9, 3:14, 4:13, 5:14, 5:21, 6:13) we often see **his** commands have a personal or local connotation.

Second, the command is an absolute ban on women teaching anyone and everyone. It does not only forbid women from teaching men. It forbids them from teaching anyone at all. There are three reasons for this: First, it goes with the command to "learn in quietness and full submission" in v.11 and second, in the Greek, "teach" is at the start of the sentence but "man" is at the end. A word-for-word translation is: *"But to teach a woman not I permit nor to have authority over a man"*. And thirdly the subject of the Greek verb "teach" should be accusative case, but "man" is in the genitive case.

With this in mind, the command must refer to some restricted context since women certainly may teach other women (Titus 2:3-4) or children (2 Tim 1:5, 3:15; Proverbs 1:8). And of course it contradicts numerous women teachers prophets and judges throughout the Old and New Testament who had significant teaching roles with men. Think about women such as Pheobe (Romans 16:1-2). This woman was a deaconess of the church in Cenchrea, who was beloved of Paul and many other Christians for the help she gave to them. She filled an important position of leadership. It would be a difficult stretch of the imagination to say that this woman fulfilled her duties without ever speaking in the church! Then there is Priscilla (Acts 18:26): Priscilla and her husband Aquila are often mentioned with great respect by Paul. Together they were pastors of a church in Ephesus, and were responsible for teaching the full gospel to Apollos. We are informed that they both taught Apollos, and pastored the church together. In fact, Priscilla is sometimes listed ahead of Aquila when their names come up. This has led some to speculate that of the two, she was the primary teacher and her husband oversaw the ministry. At any rate, we see here a woman in a very prominent position of teaching and pastoring. (Other references to Priscilla and Aquila are Acts 18:2, 18; Romans 16:3, and 1 Corinthians 16:19). Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3) were another two women who were "true yokefellow" and who labored with Paul in the advancement of the gospel. Junia also, in Romans 16:7. In this verse we see

Paul sending greetings to Andronicus and Junia, his "fellow-prisoners" who are of noteworthy among the apostles. Junia is a woman's name. In some modern translations, an "s" has been added (Junias) because the translators couldn't accept that a woman could be an apostle, they assumed a copyist had accidentally dropped the "s." However the proper male ending would have been "ius," not "ias." The reality is the earliest manuscripts say Junia and every church commentator earlier than the Middle Ages never questioned that Junia was both a woman and an apostle.

Though there were other women throughout the Bible in positions of leadership, such as prophetesses, evangelists, judges, leaders, etc., the above references should be enough to establish that women were indeed a vital and normal part of church leadership.

Clearly then, a ban on women teaching found in verse 12 must refer to some restricted context. But there are still more problems which should be looked at carefully. Firstly Witherington points out that the verb 'authentein' in vs. 12 occurs only once in the New Testament-- just here. The verb is a strong one, and there can only be two possibilities for its meaning: it can be used to mean 'to domineer' 'to usurp authority over', but it also has the sense of 'to exercise authority over' as well. What determines the translation is of course the context --- is the context one where a problematic use of power or authority is at issue? If the answer is yes, then the translation is normally 'to usurp authority over' or 'to domineer'. It refers to an illegitimate use of power or authority. The importance of this fact is clear. Paul is not talking about occasions or instances where it is perfectly proper for women to teach or exercise authority over men, something he will mention elsewhere, for example in Romans chapter 16. The issue here in Ephesus is that there are some women who are seeking to teach or take authority over men, without first being quiet and learning about their faith. This is inappropriate of course.

In short, 1 Timothy chapter 2 is talking about silence and submission in the presence of authoritative teaching and teachers. One can understand why high status Gentile women in Ephesus might think they could immediately teach in their new chosen religion: 1) women were frequently priestesses and prophetesses in the religion they had come from; 2) if one already had an education, including some education in public speaking (rhetoric) one assumed they were equipped to go ahead and speak, even teach, especially to teach those less literate and of lesser social status. Notice that Paul has restricted what these women are to wear in worship. Clearly, he is correcting high status

women who actually had fine clothes and jewels to wear, and could come to worship with high coiffed hair. It is these sorts of women he has in mind in 1 Timothy chapter 2 and 3) the verb here is 'I am not (now) permitting'. As Philip Payne has shown, there is not a single instance of the use of this verb in Greek literature where this form means "I am permanently banning women from teaching." This is a verb which implies a ban for a specific period of time until the problem is remedied or the proper conditions are met for women having learned enough to be able to teach. Paul could have said "I will never permit women to teach..." but he did not, and for a good reason. He is correcting a problem.

The use of the example from Genesis 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.*) presupposes that Timothy knows his Bible. In particular he knows the following--- that in the original creation story, only Adam is alive when the instruction is given not to eat of the tree. Early Jewish teachers then assumed that this meant Adam had taught Eve about the ban, but clearly he had not instructed her well enough, since she goes on to say to the snake that they were not even to touch the fruit. It is interesting that the verb '*deceived*' (v14) is used elsewhere in Paul to once again refer to this story (see 2 Corinthians ch11:3). What does 'deceived' mean here? It is not a comment about the woman's nature or naiveté, but rather about her lack of adequate teaching. A person not properly instructed is much more easily deceived. Such was the case with Eve, and so, Paul implies in 1 Timothy chapter 2 such is the case with these high status women who are new converts, but who think they can immediately instruct others including men.

Finally verse 15 has caused enormous headaches for commentators. Is Paul now an advocate of 'justification by grace through baby making' for women? Certainly not. To complicate things further The phrase in question says '*the childbearing*'. Most translations drop the 'the' but the Greek says: *But she may be saved through (the) Childbearing, if they remain in faith and love and holiness with sobriety/modesty.*" This is significant because it refers to a particular one, and there is the odd toggling in the Greek between the singular childbearing and the 'they' who are saved through this. Last I checked multiple women cannot give birth to a single child. This means Paul is referring to a particular childbearing-- namely the birth of Jesus through Mary. Mary is seen as Eve in reverse. Just as Eve disobeyed and the fall ensued, Mary consented to God's plan and salvation came through her into our world. The curse on us all, including the curse on women was reversed in Mary. I would add that we must

remember that the original curse involved these words--- 'your desire will be for your husband and he will lord it over you'. To love and to cherish has been twisted into "to desire" and to "dominate". In other words, both lust and the domineering of men over women are a result of the fall, which Jesus, coming to us from God through Mary came to reverse!

It is important to acknowledge that you might never deduce some of this simply from reading the mere words in the passage above. Unless the text is studied in its historical literary, rhetorical, religious etc. contexts we are bound to distort its meaning and misuse it. A truism says: "a text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to mean". The only proper hedge against misuse of such controversial texts like this is careful detailed study of the text in its immediate context. In the context of the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim, 2 Tim and Titus) noting for example how elsewhere in these documents Paul talks about older women who are mature Christians doing some teaching, in the context of Paul's letters in general, and in the context of Ephesus and the social world to which these words were written.

I hope that I have convinced you that God's plan made possible through life in Jesus is the equality between man and woman, but I suspect that this short article has not convinced everyone, but at the very least I hope that I have demonstrated that there are significant problems with the traditional interpretation of Ephesians 5:22, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15; and that there are more plausible alternative explanations. I am confident that as modern scholarship gains a greater understanding of the socio-rhetoric influences at work in these few verses the time will soon come when every church will truly practice the principle that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ. In the meantime we at Berowra Baptist Church will be faithful to the scriptures to the best of our understanding, and in doing so we say; "we see no reason why women should be excluded from teaching, preaching or pastoring in this church.

Special thanks and acknowledgment to:

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Further reading:

Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians by Ben Witherington III

Letters And Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy And 1-3 John by Ben Witherington III

This booklet was written by Dean Moore
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