

A COWARD'S LOOK AT THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

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by **Bart Larson**

INTRODUCTION

A few years ago my whole concept of the role of women in the church was shattered when my wife convinced me to read a book on the role of women in the church. Until then I had been quite smug in my beliefs. I was very comfortable in my mainstream evangelical position. The last thing I wanted to do was read literature which went contrary to what I believed. I was sure it would be a waste of time. To avoid seeming narrow-minded I finally consented to read the book my wife suggested. (If some of you are reading this because someone "twisted your arm," I can relate.)

Whether you agree with my conclusions or not, I hope you will attempt to read this with an open mind and with Bible in hand. I make no pretense of having all the answers to this complex subject (I don't).

As I write this I have four primary objectives:

1. My first goal is to keep it relatively short. For those of you reading this who would much rather be reading something else (you have my sympathy) I have tried to make your job as easy as possible.

2. For those who take scripture seriously, I want to show that a strong scriptural case can be made for women having an active role in church leadership. As a Christian who believes in Biblical inerrancy, I honestly felt that a case could NOT be made for women actively participating in church government and ministry. Until I studied the topic, about the only verses I could quote were that women were to keep "silent" (I Corinthians 14:33-36), and not have "authority" over men (I Timothy 2:11-15). It never occurred to me that my interpretation of those passages might be wrong, or that the English translations of those passages might be in question. I want to clarify some of the misconceptions I once had.

3. By God's grace I hope this booklet will promote understanding and serve to bridge the gap between those who see this subject as either liberal or conservative. It is neither. *The issue is whether it is Biblical.*

4. Last, and most importantly, I desire to glorify God. If I help some women (and men) obtain a greater appreciation of their high calling as "priests" (I Peter 2:5), then I feel that I will more than have succeeded. Regardless of what we each end up believing, we are called to love one another. It is to end that I write this booklet.

JESUS' TREATMENT OF WOMEN

Any treatise on the Biblical role of women would do well to begin by looking at how Jesus, our perfect role model, treated women.

Jesus's treatment of women was radically different from that of His contemporaries. In

Christ's day women were not formally taught, nor could they actively participate in worship. They were made to sit at the back of the synagogues. When a Jewish mother gave birth to a son there was great rejoicing. When a daughter was born there was often sympathy and disappointment expressed. Only sons had rights of inheritance. According to the Talmud (the Jewish civil and religious laws) the books of Moses (the Torah) should rather be *burned* than to be transmitted by a woman. In the temple, women were walled off into a separate area, the Court of Women. Men would often divorce their wives if their wives could bear no children. Some divorce laws were so liberal that if a wife burned a meal it was grounds for divorce.

Women were generally under some man's authority and were without independent status or means of support. They normally stayed at home and when they went out into public they were veiled. Women were viewed as a major source of evil in the world (lust, adultery, prostitution, etc.). One sect of Pharisees, called Bleeding Pharisees, walked around blindfolded so as not to be defiled by looking at women. They were referred to as Bleeding Pharisees because they were always bumping into things and getting cut.

The relaxed manner in which Jesus dealt with women, the dignity and respect He showed them, was strikingly different from the norms of His day, and, I might add, much of our world today. Jesus broke the cultural norms of the day by treating women first as people, then as women.

Jesus freely and publicly talked with women in spite of what people thought. One such incident is the account of the Samaritan woman at the well recorded in John 4. In the eyes of the Jews, she was the lowest of the low. She was a Samaritan, a woman, and an immoral one at that, yet Jesus openly talked to her to the surprise of even the disciples. Scripture emphasizes that it was through this woman that many of the "men" in the village eventually came to believe. The first Samaritan converts (mostly men) were won to Christ, not through a man, but a woman's testimony.

Many other significant firsts in the life of Christ involved women. The first person to whom Jesus revealed His messiahship was the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:26). Several major New Testament doctrines were first given to women who then passed them on to men (e.g. "God is Spirit"—John 4:24; "I am the resurrection and the life."—John 11:25, etc.). The first person to perceive and understand the cross was a woman (Mark 14:3-9). Even though John and Peter were the first at the tomb first, the first resurrection appearance was not to them but to a woman, Mary Magdalene, who, along with some other women, were the first to proclaim the resurrection. The first miracle performed was initiated by a woman (His mother) and involved a woman (Matthew 15:21-28).

From the cradle to the cross, women were vitally involved in virtually every area of Christ's life. Women witnessed His crucifixion (Matthew 27:55,56 Luke 23:49), accompanied His body to the sepulcher (Matthew 27:61), and prepared spices for His burial (Luke 23:56). Some of the last words spoken to the cross was to a woman, His mother (John 19:26,27).

Jesus was not uptight about women. He allowed women to touch Him. He touched them on numerous occasions (e.g., Luke 7:38, 13:13; Matthew 9:20, 26:7; Mark 5:23, etc.). He allowed Mary, Lazarus's sister, to take down her hair in His presence, a cultural sign of immodesty, and use her hair to wipe His feet after anointing them with ointment (John 11:2). He also allowed her to sit at His feet and be taught along with the men.—Culturally, only men were allowed to sit and be taught by rabbis. He commented her for it (Luke 10:42).

Many of the miracles in the New Testament involved healing of women (e.g., Mark 5:21-34, 5:35-43, Luke 7:11-17, 13:10-17, etc.).

Jesus made women the object of numerous stories and parables illustrating the nature and workings of God (i.e., "The kingdom of God is like women . . .," ". . . a certain widow had a mite"). Women always had direct access to Him without going through their husbands or other men. Some of Jesus's closest friends were women (e.g., Mary Magdalene, Mary and Martha, etc.). Further, Jesus taught in the Court of Women (Mark 12:38-44).

In the account of the women caught in adultery, as recorded in John 8:1-11, Jesus went against the norms of the day and treated the men as equally accountable; “Let Him who is without sin . . .” According to verse 2, Jesus had been teaching at the temple, probably the Court of Women, when this woman was brought to him. The reason for believing that this clash probably took place in the Court of Women is that it is unlikely that the Pharisees would have taken a woman into the court reserved strictly for Jewish males. It is also interesting that only the woman was brought to Jesus and not the man (it takes two to commit adultery). According to the Law of Moses (cf., Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22) both the man and woman were to be stoned. By only bringing the woman the Pharisees could have been trying to disgrace Jesus in the eyes of the women present, as well as lash out at Him for His elevated treatment of women.

Unlike most Jewish genealogies, women figured prominently in the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1:3-6, (e.g., Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth).

Some stress the fact that there were no women among the twelve disciples. That is true. They were all Jewish males. (There were no Gentiles or Blacks either.) It is important to note that women were among the traveling companions of Jesus, along with the 12 disciples (Like 8:1-3, 23:49,55, 24:10, Matthew 27:55). When people saw Jesus and the disciples coming they would most likely have seen a band of women accompanying them. That probably caused a few raised eyebrows considering the cultural climate of the day. (It probably would in our day too.) Any objective study of Jesus’s dealing with women will show that He was remarkably free and relaxed around them. He treated them as people, showing them respect and honor equal men. He seemingly went out of His way to make that fact clear to the disciples, and to us who read the gospels today.

THE GIFTING OF WOMEN

One of the clearest teachings in the New Testament is that God has given special “gifts” through the Holy Spirit. They are given to all His children, both male and female. For example, scripture says, “*So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually one another. And since we (males and females) have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let EACH exercise them accordingly . . .*” (Romans 12:5,5a emphasis mine); “*But to EACH one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good . . . But one and the same Spirit works all these things (Spiritual gifts), distributing to EACH one individually just as He wills*” (I Corinthians 12:7,11, emphasis mine); “*But to EACH one us grace was given accordingly to measure of Christ’s gift . . .*” (Ephesians 4:7, emphasis mine); and “*As EACH one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another.*” (I Peter 4:10, emphasis mine).

We note several things:

1. “*Each*” Christian, regardless of gender, has at least one spiritual gift.
2. The gifts are sovereignly assigned and given by the Holy Spirit.
3. When gifts are given they are to be used for the entire body: for edifying, encouraging, and equipping “each other.”
4. There is no evidence from any of these passages that God gave one set of spiritual gifts to men and another to women. In these passages, among the gifts listed, are pastoral and leadership gifts.

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, quoted Joel 2:28-33, a passage which spoke of women’s freedom to exercise their spiritual gifts. Since this was the inaugural speech which heralded the birth of the church, it should have special significance in determining out attitudes and understanding of God’s directives for the church.

“*‘And it shall be in last days,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even upon my bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth My Spirit and they shall prophesy.’*” (Acts 2:17,18 emphasis mine).

Women were to “prophesy.” Even women bondslaves would receive God’s Spirit, those who

were deemed among societies' lowest. All distinctions of rank were to be overlooked, whether the person was young or old, free or slave, male or female.

The gift of prophesy in the New Testament did not normally mean FOREtelling the future. Rather, it was FORTHtelling; speaking a specific word from God to His people, usually in a congregational setting. According to God's new program as outlined in Acts 2, women could speak for God as well as a men.

Of the twenty plus spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament, the only gift which is listed in each of the four New Testament passages dealing with spiritual gifts is the gift of prophecy (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and I Peter 4). **In terms of importance, prophecy ranks higher than any gift other than the gift of apostle (I Corinthians 12:28). It was higher than teaching or any other spiritual gift, including, the gift of pastoring (I Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11). Yet, prophecy is clearly a gift that women could possess (I Corinthians 11:5, Acts 2:17, 18, 21, 21:9).** Had you visited an early first century church where Paul was preaching you may well have heard women exercising the gift of prophecy (e.g., Acts 21:9).

The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that prophecy was usually a message given by the Holy Spirit through an individual for "edification, and exhortation, and consolation" (I Corinthians 14:3). Occasionally the person was empowered to make an authoritative announcement of divine will in a particular case (e.g., Acts 13:10). In rare instances it involved a prediction of a future event (Acts 11:28, 21:10).

The importance of the gift of prophecy was emphasized by Paul in Ephesians 3:5 by saying that the church was built upon the "apostles and prophets."

Some rightfully distinguish between "prophesying" and those with the "gift of prophecy" (office of prophet). In I Corinthians 14:31 it says that "all" can prophecy. However, in Ephesians 4:11 it says that only some would have the actual "gift of prophecy." For example, all Christians are to evangelize, yet God has set apart certain people with the "gift of evangelism" (Ephesians 4:11). The same applies to the gift of prophecy. While all could prophecy, some had the special gift of prophecy, including some women (Acts 21:9).

In the Old Testament whenever anyone, male or female, received a special anointing of God's Spirit that person was called to exercise his/her gift before the whole congregation. In some Old Testament instances, women were clearly called to lead men. For example:

1. Miriam, Moses's sister, helped lead Israel (Exodus 15:20).
2. Deborah was a judge over Israel, just like Samson, Gideon, Samuel, etc. (Judges 4 & 5).
3. Huldah, although married, was a prophetess to the nation (II Kings 22:14-20).
4. Isaiah's wife is also referred to as a "prophetess" (Isaiah 8:3).

Those who would restrict the public gifts of women today are exercising more restraint than was exercised over these Old Testament women. Can you imagine telling Deborah or Miriam, "I am sorry, but you cannot exercise leadership gifts because you're a woman."?—If God calls someone to ministry, who are we to stand in his/her way?

According to Acts 2:17,18, women who were anointed with the Spirit would be on a par with Old Testament prophets who spoke for God. They could prophecy.

On the day of Pentecost both men and women received the Holy Spirit (Act 1:14, 2:1-4, 17,18). It is unclear whether women preached to the crowds at Pentecost. If they did it would explain Peter's emphasis upon both men and women receiving God's Spirit and the fact that both sexes would "prophesy."

The fact that there were 120 people in the upper room may also be significant. 120 people were required to form a Jewish council. If so, women helped comprise that council.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was among those in the upper room. Earlier in her life she delivered what we call the "Magnificat" (Luke 1:46-55). Mary was chosen of God and was the human agent through whom God chose to enter this world. She was the major source for much of the information concerning Jesus, especially His early years. In the writing of the gospels Matthew

and Luke penned her words which she had “treasured in her heart.” Mary was also the prophetic fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. Jesus, the offspring from “her” would “crush” the “serpent.” However, in the most evangelical churches today, because of their stance on the role of women, Mary would not be permitted to preach concerning her Son, were she alive today.

If God has given spiritual gifts to women, who are we to tell women that they must not exercise their gifts among men? It seems to me that because of the church’s traditional stand on women, many women are forced to bury their gifts. Or, they are labeled as rebellious or trouble makers when they merely want to exercise what God has given them. According to Matthew 25:14-30 and the parable of the talents, it is a very serious matter to “bury” and not use one’s God-given talents. Rather, it is the one who uses his/her talents to whom the Master will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . .”

Other New Testament passages imply that women have the right to exercise their gifts publicly. According to Hebrews 4:16, I Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6, and 5:10, all saints, whether male or female, are “priests” unto God; meaning, among other things, that all believers have direct access into God’s presence, into the Holy of Holies. Can women have such a privileged position as “priests,” and yet remain unworthy to serve communion, act as ushers, or share in pulpit ministry if God has given them the gift of *pastor-teacher*? Priests in the Old Testament always ministered to both males and females.—If a woman is qualified as a *priest*, how can she be unqualified to be a pastor or teacher if she is so gifted? [Think about it!]

Further, aren’t all believers, whether male or female, *in Christ*. Isn’t all ministry, service, evangelism, spiritual warfare, and all Christian living to flow out of our position *in Christ*? [Yes.] In Galatians 3:28 Paul says that “*in Christ there is neither male nor female . . .*” The main issue should not be male or female, but rather gift or ungifted, saved and unsaved. Those who have salvation are *in Christ* and are all considered as *priests* without any distinction of whether they are male or female. *In Christ* there is neither male nor female.

If I am correct, may I say that through incorrect teaching on the role of women, Satan has cut the potential work force of leaders on most churches by at least half for centuries. It is like telling a combat unit that anyone with brown hair must lay down their rifles and sit on the sidelines. This is not a light matter. Much is at stake. Think of all the creative energy that could be unleashed in many of our churches if women were encouraged to serve Christ without restraint or minimizing their God-given gifts. How many jobs in our churches go either unfilled or poorly done for lack of *manpower*, while qualified, capable women are not allowed to do what desperately needs doing?

KEY NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES RELATING TO WOMEN:

1. Romans 16:1, 2

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant (Deacon) of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper (prostates) of many, and of myself as well.”

Phoebe was a woman sent by Paul to the Christians in Rome, Italy. She was very likely the one who delivered Paul’s letter which we call the book of *Romans*.—What sort of ministry would Phoebe, a woman, be performing in Rome? What unique ministry would she have that would cause Paul to send her (instead of a man) from Cenchrea (near Corinth, Greece), all the way to Rome, Italy (over 1,000 miles by land, or over 300 miles by boat and land)? It is hard to imagine that it did not involve some leadership or teaching to both men and women.

Would this woman, who had spent so much time with Paul, have only been a messenger? I can’t imagine her dropping off Paul’s letter and saying, “That’s all. I guess it is time for me to go now.”

Paul refers to Phoebe as a “*diakonos*.” This Greek word is used 29 times in the New Testament and it is translated 3 times as “*deacon*,” 7 times as “*minister*,” and 19 times as “*servant*.” It is the same word Paul used for the elected office of deacon in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8,12.

The same word “*diakonos*,” is also used of Apollos (I Corinthians 3:5), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21,22), Timothy (I Timothy 4:6), Paul (Ephesians 3:7), and is descriptive of the office of deacon which both Steven and Phillip held.

In Romans 16:1 when Paul referred to Phoebe he used the *masculine* form of the word in Greek. Technically speaking, Phoebe was a “deacon,” not a “deaconess.” (as many translations have it). It is possible that Paul used this designation to identify her on a par equal with the male deacons at Cenchrea. This would also explain why she was qualified to be a representative from the church in Greece to the church in Italy. This title would have lent credibility to her mission and made acceptance easier.

In Romans 16:2 Phoebe is referred to as a “*prostatis*” in Greek. The root word for *prostatis* means “one standing before,” “champion,” “chief,” “leader,” or “protector.” As used in Romans 16:2, it is the feminine form of the word translated “rule,” “lead,” or “manage.” In Romans 12:8 *prostatis* is translated as “leadership,” and in I Timothy 3:4,5,12 as “manage.”—The same word is used in I Timothy 5:17 as “rule” (i.e., “let the ELDERS who RULE well be. . .”). Why then do most English translations take the punch out of the word by translating it as “*helper*?”

Further, Paul said that Phoebe was a *prostatis* to him as well. Paul, the great apostle, was ministered to by a woman. To gain the force of what I think Paul may have meant, reread Romans 16:1,2 and insert the *deacon* for the word *servant*, and the word *leader* or *ruler* in place of the word *helper*. It changes the whole tone of the passage doesn't it?—Why didn't the translators translate it literally? [Think about it.]

2. I Timothy 2:11-15

“Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men, she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman (singular) was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman (singular) will be saved through childbearing, if they (plural) continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (emphasis mine).

More than any other passage in the New Testament, I Timothy 2:11-15 has caused the most confusion, dogmatism and division among Christians. There are several things to note about this passage.

First, Paul says that women were to learn (“be taught”. . . v.11). This was a radical departure from Judaism where women were not formally taught. We in the 20th century church cannot fully appreciate the liberating value of Paul's statement. Women, by and large, were not taught in Paul's day. Those who view Paul as anti-women should re-evaluate their position in light of the positive changes he set in motion by this statement.

Secondly, when Paul wrote that he did not allow women to teach or have authority over men; he used the *present active indicative* tense in Greek, which means that this verse could very accurately be translated, “*I am not CURRENTLY allowing to teach or have authority . . .*” (emphasis mine). A plausible interpretation is that as soon as the women were taught, or the cultural environment changed, then of course they could teach and have authority. Paul could very easily have used the aorist tense in Greek (a once and for all tense) had his intent been that women never teach or have authority over men.

Also, Timothy, to whom the letter was addressed, was pastoring in Ephesus. Ephesus was a stronghold of gnosticism and cult practices (Acts 19:9-27), as well as the center of worship of the goddess Diana. There were female gnostics who taught that Eve was the giver of knowledge and life to men. It is very possible these women, and their influence within the early church, was what Paul was trying to silence. Under such circumstances Paul had strong cultural reasons for writing that women should not teach. (In Titus 1:10,11 Paul demands that trouble-making men be silenced in the same way.)

Since the context of I Timothy 2 is set against the backdrop of false teachers, probably Gnostics (cf. 1:3), that would explain why Paul thought it was so important that women be taught

(2:11) so they would not be deceived (2:14). Paul already noted that at the time of his writing there were women going house to house teaching false doctrine (I Timothy 5:13). He says they were a tool of the devil (I Timothy 5:15).

Also, you need to know that in the Greek the word for “silence” is not the strong, absolute type of silence as used in I Corinthians 14:34. Rather, it is a “teachable” silence. The same word is translated as “quiet lives” in I Timothy 2:2. It is the type of reverent silence that a student shows when learning. Most first century women had no formal training which would equip them to teach. Therefore, they were to be “silent” until such time as they were qualified to teach.

In this same passage it says, “But women will be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety,” (verse 15). Why did Paul include this verse?

Mark Roberts, from Harvard, wrote the following in November-December 1981 issue of the *TSF Bulletin*: “On the surface, the statement ‘woman will be saved through childbearing’ seems innocent enough. But how can it be that a woman will be saved through childbearing? In Pauline teaching we are saved through Christ (Rom. 5:9), through confessing that He is Lord and believing in His resurrection (Rom. 15:2), and be the grace through faith (Ephesians. 2:8) . . . All people, men and women, are saved through the work of God in Christ, and by nothing else.”

Further, the Greek tenses in this passage are important. When Paul wrote that certain women must “continue in faith . . .” the text implies that he was speaking of individual women, possibly Gnostic women who were not continuing in faith. When Paul wrote that women (plural) would be “saved through childbearing (or the birth of the child)”, he was speaking about *all* women. Put another way, all women must receive salvation through Christ, and certain individual women at Ephesus could be saved “if” they would “continue in faith (i.e., as taught by Paul), and love, and holiness with modesty.”

By emphasizing Adam and Eve in verses 13 and 14, and the women’s role in giving birth to the Messiah in verse 15, Paul balances the extreme importance that was being placed upon Adam (by the Jews) and upon Eve (by women Gnostics).

There are several notable New Testament passages which clearly contradict the traditional interpretation which many evangelicals ascribe to I Timothy 2:11-15, which restricts women’s rights to teach men. For example, Priscilla, a woman, helped teach the Apollos, who later became a prominent church leader and co-laborer with Paul (Acts 18:24-26). Timothy, to whom Paul wrote concerning women teaching men was led to Christ and taught scriptures by Lois and Eunice, his grandmother and mother (II Timothy 1:5). Paul commends these women for their faithful instruction of Timothy from the “sacred writings” (II Timothy 1:5; 3:14,15). What is the difference between teaching a male child or a man? The same information is still being taught to the same person, who will, in adulthood, pass this information on to others. To say that women could never teach is a direct contradiction of Paul’s instructions in Colossians 3:16 where everyone, male and female, are admonished to “teach.”

I find those who accept the traditional interpretation, about women not teaching or having authority, are usually very inconsistent in their application of the passage. I know that was true of me. Here are some things I hope you consider:

If, as a Christian, you believe that women are not to teach or have authority over men, then scripturally you should insist that women never speak or contribute at home Bible studies for they are potentially teaching. Also, you should not read books by women authors that in any way teach (i.e. Corrie Ten Boom, Henrietta Mears, Elizabeth O’Connor, Elizabeth Elliott, Dorothy Sayers, Catherine Marshall, etc.), nor watch films by well-known women lecturers such as Becky Pippert, nor listen to women who teach on the radio (e.g., Joni Erickson Tada, Elizabeth Elliott, Joyce Meyer). Neither should women teach mixed courses at Bible Colleges or seminaries. The church should quit supporting such parachurch organizations as Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, Campus Crusade For Christ, The Navigators, and Young Life whose women staff regularly teach and have authority over mixed groups. Also, one hundred percent of church staff and leaders should be men, including Sunday School Superintendents, Adult Christian Education Directors,

etc.—And what about women missionaries? How can you ordain women missionaries to preach and teach men and women overseas, and deem these same women unfit to teach men and women at home?

If I Timothy 2:11-15 is to be understood in the traditional manner, may I say in love, that if you who hold this view, you need to be consistent. If you are a man, it is hypocritical for you to accept any teaching from women at a conference or through written material, and deny these same women the right to exercise the same spiritual gifts when the church comes together for worship. It is unfair to criticize the theological “wrongs” of those who allow women to teach, while practicing the very things you denounce.

If you have read or been taught by some of these women, you know women can be good teachers!

3. Acts 12:12

Seven of the ten New Testament passages dealing with home churches refer to women (Acts 12:12, 16:40, Romans 16:3-5, 15, I Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:2). Were these women church leaders? There are some who believe they may have been because of the manner in which they were singled out, especially Priscilla.

4. Romans 16:7

In Romans 16:7, depending on the translation, a person by the name of Junia (or Junius) is mentioned as an “apostle.” The Greek lends itself strongly to the feminine form of noun. For the first 1,000 years of church history, every commentary listed Junia as a female apostle (e.g. Chrysostom). As the centuries went by, it was shifted to the masculine form. If Junia (feminine) is correct, this should radically affect the way we view women’s roles of authority in the church. She would have held an office higher than that of elder-pastor. She would have been a pastor’s pastor and had oversight of several churches. There were many more apostles than just the twelve disciples. The New Testament mentions 19 by name. It would also mean that many Christians have misinterpreted I Timothy 1:11-15 concerning women “teaching” and having “authority” over men. Apostleship automatically carries with it leadership authority.

5. II John and Romans 16

Throughout the New Testament women are treated with respect far greater than the cultural norms of the day. In Romans 16, five of the eleven people given special greetings are women, six if one counts Junia. Throughout the epistles, both men and women are addressed. For example, John addressed the whole New Testament letter II John to the “elect lady.” (I see no reason to assume that the “elect lady” is a local church as some commentaries suggest.)

6. I Timothy 3:2-13

Qualifications for both elders and deacons are given in I Timothy 3:2-13. Verse 11, in the heart of this passage, lists qualifications for women deacons. There is no evidence that Paul is giving qualifications for wives of deacons.

I readily concede that in I Timothy 3 Paul does not list qualifications for women elders. However, as alluded to, the New Testament mentions women prophets, deacons, and one apostle (assuming that Junia was an apostle). Further, the early church fathers speak of women elders, deacons, bishops, etc. While there seems to be little evidence in the New Testament for women being elders (pastors), it should be pointed out that women held positions higher than the office of elder (e.g., apostles and prophets). If that is correct, and arguing from the greater to the lesser, then women should be allowed to be elders.

Also, in I Corinthians 4:17 Paul says, “. . . my way of life in Christ Jesus . . . agrees with what I teach.” In other words, apostolic *practice* was always in agreement with apostolic *precept* (teaching). If Paul practiced having women in leadership then he also must have taught it.

7. Romans 16:3-5

Priscilla (The wife) and her husband, Aquilla, were a team which traveled widely ministering to the early church. They were referred to as “co-workers” (Romans 16:3-5), the same term used of Paul and Apollos in I Corinthians 3:9. Priscilla and Aquilla both taught Apollos, a man well versed in scripture, a man who later became a prominent church leader. An oft’ overlooked fact is that the New Testament usually mentions Priscilla first, implying that she may have held the prominent teaching position (i.e., Acts 18:18,26; Romans 16:3; II Timothy 4:19, with the exceptions being I Corinthians 16:19 and Acts 18:2). It would be equivalent to us saying *Mrs.* and *Mr. Billy Graham*.

8. Galatians 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all in Christ Jesus.”

If we in the church do not acknowledge the first two sets of distinctions (Jew or Greek, bond or free), then why do we discriminate against females, the third grouping? Shouldn’t these groupings be broken down “in Christ?”

The emphasis of this passage is upon personhood. Anyone in Christ is on an equal standing capable of worshipping and serving God without cultural, social, or sexual distinctions.

Galatians 3:28 is set against the backdrop of baptism and how all who have been baptized into Christ are “one.” All Christians, male or female, Jew or Gentile, bond or free, are heirs together.

For those who oppose slavery, yet want to draw distinctions between men and women, may I point out that **SCRIPTURE MAKES A MUCH STRONGER CASE FOR SLAVERY THAN IT DOES FOR THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH!** Had we in today’s church lived during the Civil War, we would be aware of these arguments. For example:

a. Jesus often used slaves to illustrate His parables (i.e., Matthew 18:28, 21:34, 24:49, etc.). At no time does Jesus, or any New Testament writer, speak out against slavery.

b. Paul upheld Christians owning slaves (II Timothy 6:2). He even sent Onesimus, a runaway slave, back to his Christian owner, Philemon.

c. In Ephesians 6:5 and Colossians 3:22, Paul told slaves to submit to their owners.

d. Hosea bought his own wife back as a slave.

e. Whole sections of the Levitical law deal with Israelites owning slaves (e.g., Leviticus 25:44).

f. Abraham owned slaves (i.e., Hagar). Six of the 12 sons of Jacob (Israel) were born through female slaves. Other examples bound.

It is interesting that the women’s suffrage movement began as Christian women noticed the parallels between slavery and women’s roles. If Galatians 3:28 could be used to argue the rights of slaves, then it could be used to uphold women’s roles as well.

If we as Christians reject slavery based on the spirit of the law (regardless of the letter of the law), and because slavery runs counter to God’s original intent at creation before the fall, should not the same apply to women? Are we to treat women as though they are still under the curse?

In the “Golden Rule” we learn that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Based on this principle, there is a strong argument against slavery. How many of us would like to be slaves? For those of us who are men we must ask ourselves the same question about our treatment of women.

How many of us men would like to be overlooked for certain church positions or be told that we are not permitted to speak simply because of our sex, despite our spiritual gifts or qualifications? If we men were suddenly put into women’s bodies, how would we feel attending out present churches? What restrictions would we feel?

Note too that many of the passages used to restrict women, such as I Timothy 2, are in New Testament books of the Bible which deal with slavery. For example, in I Timothy 6:2, Paul condoned Christians owning slaves. We are anything but consistent in our treatment of these

passages, treating as applicable the sections we want (e.g., passages about women), and dismissing other sections (e.g., on slavery) as “cultural” or not in keeping with the spirit of the law.—Are you comfortable teaching that Christians can own slaves? If not, how can you reject I Timothy 6:2 as unbiblical and yet embrace I Timothy 2:15?

Of historical interest is the fact that Jewish men would recite a morning prayer, one that Paul, a former Pharisee, had probably said hundreds of times.

“Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a gentile.

Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a slave.

Blessed art thou, oh Lord our God, King of the Universe, that I was not born a woman.”

Gentiles, slaves and women were looked down on by Jewish men and were treated accordingly. In Galatians 3:28 Paul took the formula from this Jewish prayer to show that *in Christ* such distinctions were to be broken, see Romans 10:12, I Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 2:15,16. Such freedom stood in stark contrast to the Jewish movement headed by “Judaizers,” who tried to make the church conform to the mores and legal requirements of Judaism.

9. I Corinthians 11:2-16: [This is a difficult passage. If you get bogged down, skip over the parts that don’t interest you. I try to go through this passage very logically and exegetically. It requires some thinking on your part to wade through the various possibilities.]

“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I pass them on to you.”

“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of women is man, and the head of women who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors her head. It is as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”

“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head covered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice nor do the churches of God.”

a. Introduction to Headship and Veiling

In dealing with this passage I feel like I am treading where angels fear to go. In no way do I claim to have all the answers to the difficult passage. However, I believe that I have some valid insights which I trust will be of help.

I am deeply indebted to Gilbert Bilezikian, professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, and his book *Beyond Sex Roles*. Much of the material in this section came from his book.

The term “head,” as used in I Corinthians 11, is the Greek word “kephale.” It is translated “chief” three times in the New Testament (when referring to the “chief cornerstone”). It is translated “head” fifty times and as “heads” nineteen times. Of these sixty-nine times, all but three or four clearly refer to the upper part of the body, the head. (E.g., “they placed a crown of thorns on his [Jesus’] head [kephale]”).

One can find other places in the New Testament where men are referred to as the “heads” of their households (i.e. Matthew 10:25, 13:52, etc.). In such cases the Greek word, “oikodespotes,” is used. It is translated as “owner,” “landowner,” “head of the house,” or “master of the house.” The use of the word “head” in such passages emphasizes ownership or control over property, slaves, or servants. Please note that in the New Testament the word *oikodespotes* is never applied

to wives, nor is it ever used in connection with the body (i.e., the head on your shoulders).

The context of I Corinthians 11 is also important. Recall that in Greek there were no chapter breaks. It was written as one long letter. In the preceding verses at the end of I Corinthians 10, Paul makes the following points:

1.) He says that “. . . *we, who are many, are one body . . .*” (verse 17), implying that in one sense Christ is the head, not only of men but also women.

2.) Paul says that “*everything is ‘permissible’ but not everything is beneficial*” (verse 23). This has interesting implications for those who make a law out of men’s headship and women’s roles in the church, especially in regards to veiling. As the context seems to indicate, Paul’s teaching on freedom would extend to headship and veiling as well.

3.) While Paul speaks of the believer’s freedom, he also teaches that we are to be sensitive so as not to cause “Jews,” “Greeks,” or “the church of God” to stumble.—There is a place for proper decorum. In light of these (verses 32,33), and the fact that all things are to be done to the glory God (verse 31), Paul addresses the issue headship and veiling.

b. Headship

The women’s veil mentioned in I Corinthians 11 is the Jewish tallith. In Mideastern cultures, a veil sometimes covered the entire face (e.g. That is how, in Genesis 29, Jacob was fooled into marrying Leah instead of Rachael. He couldn’t see her face.) Other times it just covered the hair. Occasionally it would be wrapped around the lower part of the face to show that the woman was betrothed or married. This is still practiced in many Muslim countries. It is doubtful that a hat or handkerchief, which some women in churches use today, would qualify as a “veil” in the way Paul used the term.

In II Corinthians 3:12-18 Paul says, “*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed . . .*” and that Christ the “veil is taken away.” Even if the physical practice of veiling was to be observed for cultural reasons, it was in no way to be constructed as a block to women experiencing the full glory of God with “unveiled faces.”

Further, we know from church history that the early church fought the strong influence of Judaizers, so-called Christians, who taught that salvation was not solely through the work of Christ on the cross, but by keeping the Mosaic Law. If my understanding is correct, according to the Judaizers, a woman could forcibly shaved or even divorced if she refused to wear a veil. (This helps explain Paul’s reference to having a woman’s head shaved if she didn’t wear a veil.)

The reasons a wife was to wear a veil to church was to show honor to her husband and avoid being a social disgrace or an embarrassment to her husband. Depending on the commentary one reads, an unveiled head was possibly a sign of loose morals. Not to be veiled would be like having one’s head shaved (verse 6), which would have been a sign of disgrace or possibly, as I have read but been unable to confirm, a sign of prostitution. In our Western culture it is hard for us to relate to issues such as veiling or unshaved heads. In their culture it was a hot topic.

To complicate matters, Paul uses the word *head* in at least two different ways: *figuratively* and *literally*. He says that a woman should cover her head (the literal head on her shoulders) so as not to dishonor her “head” (her figurative head, her husband). Paul goes on to say that a man should not cover his head (his literal head) so as not to dishonor his head (his figurative head who is Christ). As we see, Paul used the term head (*kephale*) in two ways, literally and figuratively. It is the figurative use of the term head causes all of the confusion. Just what does it mean?

Let me begin by stating the obvious:

1.) The term head is very clearly identified with “honor” (see verses 4 and 5). A woman who prays or prophesies without her head covered “dishonors” her husband for it is a “disgrace” (verse 6). The opposite is true of the man. He “dishonors” his head if he covers his head (verse 4).

2.) The setting is worship. Veiling in no way seems to restrict either the man’s or woman’s freedom to worship. The woman in verse 5 has complete freedom, as does the man, to

pray and prophesy. This was a radical departure from Judaism where women sat in the back of the Synagogues and were not permitted to meaningfully participate in worship.

3.) Paul seems to be speaking to married couples rather to men and women in general. The man in verse 3 is married. Whether headship is inclusive of all men is debatable. Based on the creation narrative discussed in verses 8-10, that is possible.

Areas that are not obvious: What Does Headship Mean?

The big question is, “What does the figurative use of the word *head* mean?” There are several possibilities. As best as I can, let me outline the options, and I will discuss them one by one.

- 1.) First is that the word head might mean “**origin, source, or fountain head.**”
- 2.) The second possibility is that the term head carries with it a sense of **power and authority.**
- 3.) The third is that the head is the seat of “**honor.**”
- 4.) The fourth is headship may refer, not so much to authority, but to a **chain of responsibility.**
- 5.) The last would be a **combination** of one or more of the preceding four points.

Four possible meanings of Headship:

1.) Does Head Mean Origin, Source, or Fountainhead?

a.) According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans Pub.), in a study of contemporary non-biblical writings of the first century, the term head (“*kephale*”) was never used in an authoritative sense, but rather meant “*source or fountainhead*” (e.g., “head of a river”). This would fit with the cornerstone of the temple being called the “*chief (kephale) cornerstone,*” as it was the fountainhead upon which the rest of the temple was built. A stone does not have authority. Honor, yes. Authority, no.

b.) While the Old Testament term “*head*” did carry with it the sense of authority, it is interesting that when the Old Testament was translated into Greek (i.e., the *Septuagint*), not once did the *Septuagint* use the word “*kephale*” for any of the 150 times that “*head*” was used in the authoritative sense. This suggests that the term “*head*” as used in I Corinthians 11 should not be understood in an authoritative sense.

c.) Had Paul meant leadership to be understood in an authoritative sense his argument should have been listed God first, Christ second, man third, and woman last. As Paul lists in I Corinthians 11, it is almost the opposite. God is last. One possible argument that Paul is speaking of headship in the sense of source or fountainhead is that he presents his examples as though one flows from the the preceding. In chronological order, man came from Christ at creation. (I.e., Christ is creator and source of man’s existence . . . see Colossians 1:16-18). Woman came next from man (i.e., Adam’s rib), and lastly Christ came from God (i.e., at the incarnation).

d.) There is one New Testament passage, Colossians 2:19, which gives a description of what Jesus’s “*headship*” over his body, the church means. It reads, “. . . not holding fast to the head (Jesus) from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by joints and ligaments, grows with the growth which is from God.”—In this passage the emphasis is not upon authority, but upon Christ who lovingly supplies the needs of the body that growth might occur. He is the source and origin of all growth.

e.) Christ is the head of the body, the church, which is comprised of men and women (I Corinthians 10:17). Thus, in a very real sense, a woman’s “*head*” is also in Christ. If ever the two “*heads*” disagree, she must obey Christ, not her husband.

f.) Another reason to believe that headship does not involve authority is that, while God is said to be the “*head*” of Jesus, Jesus is said to possess all authority “*in heaven and on earth*” (Matthew 28:18). If authority were the main issue we would expect Jesus to say that “*all authority*” rested with the Father rather than Himself. To use a parallel analogy, men would have to give women “*all authority,*” just as the Father gave Jesus “*all authority.*” Why? Because

in this passage the Father and Jesus stand in a similar relationship as man and woman. The Father gave up some authority to the Son. Are men willing to give up the same authority to women?

2.) Does Headship Mean Authority?

Traditionally, for several centuries, headship has been thought to mean authority. By authority I mean that one person is considered the head (boss, chief, foreman, president, decision-maker, etc.). The one who is head has the greatest voice when it comes to decision-making.

Did Paul link headship with authority? In the previous section I gave seven reasons which argue that he didn't. Now, let me list three arguments that suggest headship does carry a sense of authority:

a.) In I Corinthians 11:10 Paul uses the word "authority," in discussing headship. He says that a woman is to have "a *sign* of authority on her head . . ." The words "as a symbol" or "as a sign," which many English translations insert, are not in the original Greek. This verse literally reads, ". . . woman ought to have authority on her head." It is debatable whether the words "as a sign" or "as a symbol" should be included in the text. This passage can stand by itself without the addition of these words. Depending on a person's theological leanings, it can be argued that a husband has authority over his wife; or Paul could be saying that woman should be veiled to represent the fact that when she is veiled she has authority equal to that of the man.

The word Paul uses for "authority" in I Corinthians 11:10 is the New Testament word generally translated "power" or "authority." For example, it is the same word used of Jesus having power and authority over Satan, of Kings who rule, etc. It is translated 65 times as "authority," 7 times as "authorities," 12 times as "power or powers," 11 times as "right," and 7 times as either "control," "domain," "dominion," "in charge," "jurisdiction," or "liberty."

b.) Some argue that the head controls the body thus indirectly implying that headship does involve authority (i.e., the body obeys the head's command). This may or may not be a valid argument. It is not clear that this is what Paul had in mind. To interpret "head" in an authoritative sense, because that head controls the body, might be as wrong as interpreting "bowels" (King James Version) in Philemon 7, 12, 20, and John 3:17 to mean intestines, or the word "heart" in Matthew 12:30 to mean a muscle which pumps blood.

c.) While one can say that Christ's headship over the church stressed growth and not authority, some passages of scripture very clearly link Christ's headship to authority. For example, in Ephesians 1:21-22 it says that all things are "*under his feet*" and that he is "*head over everything*." Also, there is no getting around the fact that Christ is "Lord." The word Lord, or Lordship, very clearly carries with it the concept of power and authority.

If headship carries a sense of authority, and it might within the context of marriage, then husbands must realize they are accountable to God, in a way their wives aren't, for the use or misuse of that God-given responsibility.

3.) Does Headship Mean Honor?

As mentioned earlier in I Corinthians 11:4, 5, Paul associates headship with honoring or dishonoring one's head depending on whether one wears a veil (in the case of the wife) or does not wear a head covering (in the case of the husband).

In verse 7 Paul says, "Woman is the glory of man." Some legitimate questions arise: Are men treating women as their glory? Are they honoring them or suppressing them? According to verse 5 they are to be equal participants in worship by being allowed to pray and prophesy. (A question many churches should ask is this: What opportunity are we (you) giving women to publicly pray and prophesy?)

Showing honor takes on special importance because Paul interjects a spiritual dimension to it. According to Paul, one's head is to be honored, not just for cultural reasons, but for the "angels" (verse 10). It may surprise you (it did me) to discover that in I Corinthians 11 Paul used three *noncultural reasons* for why women should be veiled: to honor man as her "head" based on the

order of creation (verses 6, 9), for the *angels* (verse 10) and because nature teaches it (verse 14). Believe me, this adds an interesting twist to this discussion! How are 20th century (soon to be 21st century) Christian women to apply this teaching?—I wish I knew.

Paul says that women should show special honor to their husbands during worship, for the *angel's sake* because man was created first and became the source (head) of all human life. Angels were present at creation, when, as you recall, they “sang for joy” (Job 38:7).

The Lord's Supper commemorates Christ's death. Is honoring a man's headship by wearing a veil a commemoration of all that God did in creation? Is that why wives should do it, “for the angel's sake?”

Please note that when veiling is linked to the concept of authority in verse 10, that it is related, not to the husband's authority, but as a visible sign to the angels. I must confess my ignorance. I am sure there is a lot more here than meets the eye. I accept and believe God's word, although in this instance, but I do not understand it. Nor, do I have firm recommendations on how Christian women are to implement, if at all, this practice in worship.

4.) Does Headship Mean Responsibility?

Does headship mean responsibility? In verse 11 and 12, after introducing the concept of “authority,” Paul stressed that there should be equality between husband and wife. In verse 11 he says. “However in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.” So that Paul's earlier teaching on headship not be misunderstood, he apparently added this closing comment. He de-emphasizes authority and instead emphasizes the fact that husband and wife are interdependent “in the Lord.”

Some say, and I am inclined to agree, that there is a distinction to be made between a chain of authority and a chain of responsibility. Authority focuses outwardly on how well the other person obeys. When a person in authority says, “jump,” success is measured on whether the other person jumps and how quickly.

Responsibility is inward and focuses upon accepting accountability for oneself and how well one perform his/her duties before God. Possibly headship is not so much an issue of how well the husband exercises his authority, but is rather measured by how well he assumes his God-given responsibilities (e.g., provider, protector, etc.). In such cases a woman should honor her husband. Such affirmation is invaluable for the husband.

For people who want to interpret headship to mean responsibility, I have no problem. While “subjective,” is feels right. I personally would like to think that this is more in keeping with what Paul had in mind. Where “honor” is concerned it is far easier for a wife to extend honor and respect to a husband who is assuming responsibility for himself before God, than for a wife to show honor to a dictatorial husband who may or may not be benevolent.

Where submission is an issue, most wives could submit to men who unconditionally love them and who are submitting themselves wholeheartedly to God.

e. Danger of Interpreting Headship To Mean Authority

Having said all this, let me list several dangers I see inherent in the traditional authoritarian teaching about Headship. The following points do not prove that the authoritarian view is wrong, only that it is easily abused. These are things you may want to consider:

1.) Patriarchal authority often fosters an abuse of power on the part of men, especially those of us (myself included) who are inclined to be self-centered. Emotional abuse by husbands is a major problem counselors see among women clients. Such husbands often convey an attitude of, “Just shut up and submit like a wife should!”

2.) Women often sacrifice their gifts and *who they are* because they don't want to show up their husbands. This often happens when the wife is spiritually strong and the husband is weak. Many is the woman who has buried her talents and gifts to the detriment of God's kingdom because she has not wanted to rob her husband of his headship. The trouble is some husbands

never exercise authority spiritually. One of the biggest problems in the church today is the passive American male.

3.) Anger, frustration, and resentment are often the by-product of women who acquiesce to their husband's demands, especially if the husband habitually makes bad decisions, or abuses his power.

4.) What many men want seemingly is not a peer for a wife, but a glorified maid-cook-concubine. Men who interpret headship in terms of only authority do not follow the example of their own spiritual head, the Lord Jesus. He taught that true greatness lies not in terms of authority and control, but rather in terms of service. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and sacrificed His life for them. He spent time with them, taught them, and called them "friends" (John 15:15).

What I sometimes see in strongly authoritative homes is not a peer relationship being fostered between the husband and wife, but one where the husband treats his wife with disrespect. Sadly, such men do not respect things they deem lower than themselves.

Jesse Penn-Lewis in her book, *Are Women Human*, said, "True headship is won by self-sacrificing love, even as Christ won His church, not by rule or domination, but by laying down His life for her."

5.) Lastly, many men pull rank whenever there is a marital disagreement. They assume the wife must give in because of the headship principle, without seriously questioning their own motives, whether they are truly right and whether this is the way Christ would handle the situation.

As Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian points out in his book, *Beyond Sex Roles*, there are better ways to scripturally resolve differences than to resort to "headship" in the Authoritative sense. Let me summarize the ten ways he outlines in his book to resolve split decisions:

1. Practice deferring to one another in love and mutual submission (Philippians 2:3-4, Ephesians 5:21, Galatians 5:13).

2. Divide responsibilities for decision making according to the spiritual gifts, experience, and competence that each possesses.

3. Lovingly seek compromises, which is a Biblical approach (Luke 14:31-33, Acts 6:1-6, 15:37-40).

4. Define the Biblical principles involved in the debated issues.

5. Pray together for guidance through circumstances.

6. Allow God to provide guidance through circumstances.

7. Whenever a decision affects one spouse more than the other, the spouse who has more at stake in the decision should have the greater say.

8. Initiate joint research on the debated issue. Read, attend conferences, and take courses to develop a basis for sound judgement (Ephesians 5:17; James 1:5,6).

9. Seek counsel from a trusted, objective third party (I Corinthians 6:5).

10. Engage in role reversals where each takes turns stating the other spouses views. This greatly aids communication and understanding.

Dr. Bilezikian says, "According to the 'one flesh' principle, the more directive and authoritarian you act toward your spouse, the more damage your marriage and impoverish your own life . . . the more you affirm and build up your spouse and encourage his or her independent growth, the more you enhance your marriage and enrich your own life . . ." (*Beyond Sex Roles*; Gilbert Bilezikian; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan; 1985, page 214.)

f. Closing Thought on Headship/Veiling

Speaking candidly, the subject of headship is very complicated. I do not have all the answers. Depending on a person's theological view(s) good arguments can be made for each position.

Most churches dismiss the seeming literal teaching of I Corinthians 11 regarding veiling because off *cultural reasons* in spite of Paul's *non-cultural arguments*. Yet, they stress male

authority. I am not sure this is right. In this passage there is much stronger scriptural support for women wearing veils than for men having authority. Numerous verses speak of veiling, while only one verse speaks of *authority*, and that is in the context of *angels* (verse 10).

As Peter wrote in II Peter 3:16 concerning the difficulty of understanding Paul's writing, ". . . *speaking in them of these hard to understand . . .*" I totally agree! Having read numerous books and commentaries dealing with I Corinthians 11, I found almost as many interpretations and shades of meaning as books I read. Although I have strived to be honest and fair in my treatment, if I err at all, and I probably have, I would rather err on the side of grace and freedom, than on the side of legalism and authoritarianism.

The bottom line, as I see it, is that whether or not women wear veils, and regardless of how one interprets *headship*, both men and women are interdependent "in the Lord" (verse 11), and both may, as the Spirit leads, "*pray and prophesy*" (verse 5). Just as there is incredible love, respect and honor within the Godhead, husbands and wives are to model the same love and respect for one other.

10. I Corinthians 14:33-36:

"Let the woman keep silent in the churches: for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?"

In Greek, the word Paul uses for silence is a very strong word implying total, absolute silence. It would seemingly include tongues, interpretation, teaching, prayer, and even whispering.

This poses an apparent contradiction. Do you recall that Paul, three chapters earlier (11:5), said that women could "pray and prophesy." How are women to maintain total silence and yet be allowed to *pray and prophesy*?—Hmmm.

Also, in context with 14:33,36, Paul says in 14:31, "*For you can all prophesy one by one, so that ALL may learn and ALL may be exhorted.*" (emphasis mine). Paul was obviously writing to both men and women. It is inconceivable that the only ones who could learn or be exhorted were men (see I Timothy 2:11). As discussed earlier, according to Acts 2:17,18, it is assumed that women who received the gift of prophesy would be able to use their gift.

So, what is the solution to this striking contradiction between verse 11:5 and 14:31, which give women the right to speak, contrasted with 14:33-36 which says women are to remain silent? How can women both pray and prophesy and yet be told to remain absolutely silent?

Some think Paul was speaking of a qualified silence. If, as is very possible, the congregation was segregated with men and women sitting separately, some women could have been abusing their newly gained freedom to speak by asking a lot of questions of their husbands during the service thus explaining Paul's comment about asking their husbands at home. In other words, Paul's comment on women's silence may have had nothing to do with women participating meaningfully in worship. The major trouble with this interpretation is that it seems to be a violation of the Greek word Paul uses for silence.

A second viable interpretation is that possibly verses 34 and 35 are actually a quote by the Judaisers whom Paul was attempting to refute. Remember that in Greek there were no quotation or punctuation marks of any kind. Is there evidence that Paul was quoting the Judaisers? Yes there is.

In verse 34 Paul says women are ". . . *not permitted to speak . . . as the Law says.*" (Emphasis mine.) This statement is very uncharacteristic for Paul. For example, Paul goes to great lengths in both Romans and Galatians to teach that believers are no longer under the Law and in this same letter to the Corinthians he says, "*all things are lawful*" (I Corinthians 10:23). **What is interesting about this reference to the Law, is that one can read the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi and never find that quote or teaching.** One can, however, find it in the *oral law of the Judaisers!* Paul may have been contrasting the church's position (verse 31) with that of

the Judaiser's (verse 34 and 35).

Numerous times in I Corinthians Paul disagrees with what the Corinthians had asked him (e.g., 1:12, 3:4, 6:12, 13, 18, 8:1, 4, 8, 10:23). He often introduces his rebuttal statements by using the Greek participle "e" to indicate those things which he considers nonsense. For example, the following passages are introduced with the "e" participle; 6:1-2, 9, 16, 19, 9:6, 8, 10, 10:22. In 14:36 Paul writes "'e' (nonsense) did the word of God originate with you?" Since Paul in each of the previously cited cases precedes a statement he disagrees with by using the "e" participle (nonsense), it would mean that Paul rejects as nonsense the teaching that women should be silent.

The church at Corinth met at the home of Gaius, (Romans 16:23, I Corinthians 1:14). Very possibly the Judaizers had been upset when Priscilla and Aquilla came to minister there (Acts 18:1-18). They were not used to having a woman (Priscilla) minister to men. In Asia Minor here Priscilla and Aquilla were from, women were held in much higher honor and were allowed to rule in government, etc..

Paul's response in verse 36, "*Was it from you [masculine] that the word of God went forth . . .*" may have been directed toward the Judaizers. Paul shifts from using the 3rd person pronoun "they" (referring to women) to the 2nd person masculine. In other words, Paul is taking men to task in this verse, not the women who were speaking.

Dr. Bilezikian paraphrases verse 36 as follows, "since when have you (men) become the source of divine revelation so that you (men) can make your own rules? Or are you the exclusive recipients of divine revelation that the rest of us should know about?" (Ibid, page 152). So, were these men Judaizers? —Very possibly.

There are several questions which the traditionalist position should be prepared to answer. If you say women are to remain silent, how do you explain the apparent contradiction between women being told to be silent (Chapter 14) versus pray and prophesy (Chapter 11)? What about Paul's reference to the Law? If one advocates that everything in I Corinthians 14 be taken at face value, and one does not attribute any of it to possible quotes by the Judaizers, how is the church to enforce this absolute silence on the women in their fellowship? I would not want to be among the pastors/elders who had to enforce this rule!

II. Ephesians 5:21, 22:

“. . . be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject (the word “subject” is not in the Greek text) to your husbands, as to the Lord . . .

I address this passage only because it is often quoted to support male rule. As you will note the context is marriage, not the church, except in so far as marriage parallels Christ and the church.—Are their distinct roles within marriage? Yes, I think scripture teaches there are. Does the husband have the main responsibility for leading the family and is the wife to submit and respect her husband's leading? Before God I believe the answer is, "yes" (with some qualifications)

As cited, the word *subject* does not appear at all in verse 22 in the Greek, although it does in verses 21 and 24. Literally translated verse 22 reads, "*. . . wives to your husbands as to the Lord.*"

One needs to go back to verse 21 to find out what Paul is referring to in verse 22. Verse 21 speaks of mutual submission, "*and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*" One can raise the question, "Is mutual submission really possible unless there is equality?" "Is it mutual submission if one person is always expected to submit to the other?" [No.]

In verse 25 when Paul told husbands to love their wives, if one takes Paul's definition of love from I Corinthians 13, "*. . . love does not seek its own,*" then he in effect is telling men to be willing to mutually submit also.

For those who insist that this passage speaks strongly of an authoritarian relationship, may I point out that this passage is totally void of any kind of provision for insubordination. It is true that the Greek term for "submission" was a military word. In the military there are all sorts of ways to enforce submission. I don't think husbands should beat their wives into submission as the

Koran instructs Moslems to do if their wives remain “disobedient” (Surah 4:34).

However, when Jesus submitted to the Father it was out of love, not in a military sense. Therefore, it is questionable just how far one can press that definition, since our submission is patterned after Christ.

Several key New Testament passages speak of Christians mutually submitting to one another (i.e., I Corinthians 16:16, Ephesians 5:21, I Peter 5:5, etc.). In each case it is a voluntary submission, not enforced. (In Colossians 3:18 and Titus 2:5, when submission is talked about for wives, it is also a voluntary submission as to the Lord.) It is the law of courtesy, yielding preference to one another out of love. While wives are instructed to submit to their husbands, husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Before a husband “pull rank” he should first search his heart. Is this what Christ would have me to do or am I just acting selfishly?

In like manner, if a wife does not submit to her husband she too should question her motives. Is it mere rebellion (cf. I Samuel 15:23), selfishness or truly the promoting of the Holy Spirit?

May I point out that the same word for subject is also used for Jesus as a boy who submitted to his parents. Yet, he did not consult them when he was about his Father’s work (e.g. when his parents had to search for him for three days and finally found him at the temple.) In like manner, wives still have a responsibility to listen to the Lord and not just their husbands.

The ideal marriage, it seemed to me, is when, as with Priscilla and Aquilla, a husband and wife can operate as a team. That means that there will be times when each spouse, in love, will yield to the other, and that rather than marriage being a series of win/lose situations (the husband wins, the wife loses), come promises will be sought. Otherwise it is too easy for insensitivity to develop on the part of a husband who always gets his way, or too easy for resentment to grow in a wife who has to constantly swallow her wishes and submit to her husband.

We live in a society preoccupied with watching out for number *one* and being quick to assert our rights. There are many times when the Bible does not conform to the women’s lib movement. But, neither does it fit the male chauvinist mold either. And why should that surprise us? Apart from the work of Christ we are all inherently selfish. There are times when we have legitimate cause to assert ourselves. However, in keeping with the overall principles of scripture, we do well to ask ourselves two questions.

First, “What is the loving thing to do?” At times the most loving thing to do is submit to another’s wishes. At other times, for the other person’s good, the loving thing to do is *not* to submit if submission would work to the detriment of the one we love (i.e., by reinforcing dictatorial spirit for causing harm to our spouse or others). The second question is, “What is my motivation; love or self-centeredness?”

My last observation is that this section which started in Ephesians 5 does not conclude until the end of Chapter 6 and are putting on the armor of Christ. Paul talks about several groups of people submitting; particularly wives, children and slaves. Then he says, “***Finally***, *be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...*” (emphasis mine).

Where do we gain the supernatural power to live the life Paul has been describing?—It is our being strong in Christ. Who is the enemy? Is it our spouse, boss, parents or others?—No. We are told that the enemy of our souls, and I might add, of our marriages as well, is Satan. He is the unseen force behind rebellion and self-centeredness. Only as we take spiritual warfare seriously and draw our strength from Christ will Christian marriage even remotely model Christ and the love He has for His church.

12. I Peter 3:1-8

“Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands . . . They (godly women of old) were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give her way to fear. Husbands, in the

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

Again, the context has to do with marriage, not the church, and to my way of thinking in no way negates God’s ordained role for women within the church. The two views are not mutually exclusive. To submit to one’s husband and yet speak or teach with Christ’s blessing is very possible (e.g. Priscilla and Aquilla).

There are numerous places in the New Testament where slaves and children are told to obey. There is only one reference to a wife *obeying* her husband and that is this passage where Sarah obeys Abraham and calls him her “lord” (IPeter 3:6). Peter commends Sarah’s behavior and instructs Christian wives to follow her as a role model (v. 7).

Some could argue that this was cultural, just as slaves obeying their masters was also cultural. Clearly, such is not the case with children obeying their parents.

It is my guess that those wives who most resist the idea of submitting to their husbands probably need to submit more and show more honor and respect to their husbands. For the husbands who are saying, “Right on! Preach it, brother!”, they are probably in danger of abusing their position. A gift such men could give their wives would be to treat them with more respect and afford them more freedoms as equals in the Lord.

The last part of verse 6 emphasizes that a wife’s submission to her husband should not be out of “*fear*.” (This also indirectly tells husbands not to cause fear.) And, as previously pointed out, there are also major responsibilities placed on the husband not to abuse his role of leadership. Balance seems to be the key. A husband who never submits to his wife’s wishes is out of step with the many other verses pointed out thus far in this booklet which instruct him to honor, love, respect, mutually submit and lay down his life for the well-being of his wife. Peter goes on to say that husbands and wives are “fellow heirs” together. Note: while there is submission there is also equality, just as Jesus was *subject* to the Father and possessed equality with the Father (John 5:18; Phil 2:6). Must women wait until Heaven to share their equal spiritual privileges as fellow heirs?

When Peter refers to women as “weaker vessels” he is referring to their physical body (their “vessel”), not moral, intellectual, spiritual or social weaknesses. Just as wives by nature seem more geared to nurturing, husbands by nature are more equipped physically to provide and protect. I disagree with the women’s lib movement which tries to erase all distinctions between men and women. Thank God for differences.

A phrase well worth pondering is, “. . . *grant her honor as a fellow heir*.” In spiritual matters she is to be granted “honor,” not treated as inferior, but as a “fellow heir.” One way to grant her honor, of course, is to let her exercise her spiritual gifts within the local assembly. Whenever husbands do not bestow honor on their wives it builds a barrier, not only between the husband and wife, but between the husband and God to the extent that Peter says the husband’s prayers may be hindered.

KEY OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES

1. Genesis 1 & 2

Genesis, chapters 1 and 2, record God’s acts of creating man and woman. There are several interesting points which should be noted:

In Genesis 1:26 when God made “man” it says that He made them (plural) “male and female.” Thus “man,” as uses in 1:26, refers to both males and females.

In the first two chapters of Genesis there is no mention of any pattern of authority. In Genesis 1:27 both man and woman are “*made in the image of God*,” which implies, among other things, that God has a feminine side as well as a masculine side.

2. Genesis 2:18 & 22

“*Then the Lord God said ‘It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him’ . . . And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and*

brought her to the man.”

The term “helper,” or more accurately, “help-meet,” comes from two Hebrew words: “help” (ezer) and “meet” (neged). The word “ezer” translated “help,” is used 21 times in the Old Testament. Sixteen times it is a SUPERordinate helper, not a SUBordinate helper. In other words, the one doing the helping is the stronger of the two. For example, “My help (ezer) comes from the Lord . . .” In none of the 21 times is the term ever a subordinate helper (e.g., like a slave).

The second term “neged,” translated “meet,” means “before.” For example, in Psalm 23, “*Thou preparest a table before (neged) me . . .*” The word “before” is the same word translated “meet” in Genesis 2:18. In short, woman was not created to be a glorified, but a “help-meet” in the fullest sense of equality. She was an equal part of the team. God knew man needed such a person.

Some say that because woman was taken from Adam’s rib, she is inferior. Adam was taken from dust. Does that make Adam inferior to dust?

In commenting on Genesis 2, Richard Foster (*Money, Sex, and Power, Harper and Row p. 93*) says, “God used the rib to underscore their independence . . . the two of them interwoven, interdependent, interlaced; no fierce rivalry, no heirarchical one-upmanship, no independent authority . . .”

Some use the argument that because man was created first he is therefore superior. The monkey was created before Adam. Does that make the monkey superior to Adam? In fact, following God’s order of creation and the fact that each created thing was higher in prominence than that which preceded it, that would put woman at the top, if one chooses to use that line of reasoning.

3. Genesis 3:16

In Genesis 3:16, following the fall, God told Eve, “*I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be your husband, and he shall rule over you.*” God said that He would personally increase the woman’s pain in childbirth. God also states a fact, “*Your desire shall be your husband.*”

Does desire mean that the wife will want to submit to her husband? Actually, just the opposite is probably true. The word *desire* carries with it the meaning of *control*. For example, God told Cain in Genesis 4:7, “. . . *sin is crouching at your door; it desires (same word in the Hebrew) to have you.*”—Sin wanted to dominate and control Cain. Its *desire* was for him.

So, what is Genesis 3:16 about?—It is about control. There will be constant tension because men will rule over their wives. Some wives like it that way, and for other it is a battle.

Another question to ask yourself is whether this passage is *prescriptive* (i.e., the way God intended it) or *descriptive* (what God knew would happen). Obviously, some of the curses were God ordained (e.g., pain in child birth, thorns, etc.). However, note that in the previous verse (v. 15), as God addressed Satan, God told Satan that “*He (Jesus) shall bruise you (Satan) on the head, and you (Satan) shall bruise Him (Jesus) on the heel.*” Did God make Satan instigate Christ’s death? Was God the author of evil? No, God allowed it for good.

What I am driving at is this; the prophecy in Genesis 3:15 is *descriptive* of what Satan would do and how God would use it. Couldn’t the last half of verse 16, regarding a woman’s desire for her husband, also be *descriptive* of what God knew would happen as a result of Adam and Eve’s newly acquired sin nature rather than *prescriptive* of what He wanted to happen?

The phrase, “*he shall rule over you*” can also be translated, as the Jerusalem Bible Translation has it, “*he shall lord it over you.*” As history shows, men have dominated and ruled over women, children, slaves and animals; and time and time again men have abused them.

The unbalanced dominance of men was the outgrowth of the effects of sin and the fall resulting in the disruption of the relationship between men and women. The physically stronger would dominate and lord it over the physically weaker. Look at the abuses of men over women and it is sickening. For example, in China, it used to be that when a young girl turned about 5 or 6 years of

age men would break the girl's feet at the arches and tie the toes back by the heels to insure that they would never run away. Girls, even in the United States in some larger cities, are routinely forced into prostitution rings. By age 18, one in three females will have been sexually abused in some fashion.

Also, observe that in every pronouncement of God on Genesis 3:16-19 (whether descriptive or prescriptive) mankind has tried to lessen the effects of the fall and God's judgments. For example, we have doctors and drugs to help lessen the pains of childbirth. Is that wrong? I think not. Men are always trying to lessen their work load and decrease the "*sweet of their brow*." Is that wrong? No. The question then arises, "If mankind has tried to lessen ALL of the curses and judgments arising from the fall, why is it wrong to try to reinstate woman back to her original position before the fall?" We do it in every other area related to the fall.

Further, if women's subservience to man is the result of the curse, and in Christ the curse has been lifted (Galatians 3:13), then are we not perpetuating a condition that God wants to eliminate? [Please do not pass over this argument lightly!] Are women to be treated as though they are still under the curse?

4. Women As Members of the Old Testament Covenant

The Mosaic Law made provision for women. They were to share the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8), to benefit from the reading of the Law (Deuteronomy 31:9-13), and to rejoice before Yahweh.

They too could bring sacrifices (Leviticus 12:6, 15:29). Children were to honor both parents. In Leviticus 19:3 it mentions the mothers first. It is important to realize that most of the restrictions placed on women which we see referred to during that time of Christ, and the introduction of the Lower Court of Women, are not found in the Old Testament, but are an intertestamental and unbiblical innovation which grew out of a corrupt Judaism. According to Deuteronomy 29:9-18 women were to be full members of the covenant.

5. Women Inquiring of God

Women could inquire of God independently of their husbands (e.g., Manoah's wife-Judges 13:3, and Hannah, I Samuel 2:22).

6. Some Prominent Women in the Old Testament

There were several prominent women leaders in the Old Testament. Huldah was a prophetess to both the king and high priest (II Kings 22:14). Deborah was a prophetess and judge in Israel, a one-woman supreme court. Barak was afraid to go into battle so Deborah accompanied him to the battle front. The victory was won through Deborah and another woman, Jael, who killed the commander of the opposing army (Judges 4:17-22). Miriam, Moses' sister, was a *prophetess* (Exodus 15:20-cf. Numbers 12:1, 2), as was Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3). Other women who had a big hand in the fate of Israel were Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6), Esther (See the Book of Esther), Ruth (See the Book of Ruth), and Jehosheba (II Kings 11:1-20). During the growing up years of Moses, prior to the exodus from Egypt, it was women that God used to thwart the plans of Pharaoh; the midwives (Exodus 1:17), the Israelite mothers (Exodus 1:19), Moses' mother and sister (Exodus 2:3-9), and lastly Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:5-7).

7. Genesis 17:15, 16

Sarah, who is the mother of many nations, the wife of Abraham, held a very prominent position spiritually and socially. Her name in Hebrew meant, "female prince or chieftainess." (Genesis 17:15, 16). In the east where Abraham and Sarah were from, the society was both matriarchal and patriarchal.

8. Genesis 36:43

In Genesis 36:43 the chiefs of Edom were women.

9. Exodus 38:8 and I Samuel 2:22

In Exodus 38:8 and I Samuel 2:22 there were women priests serving at the door of the tabernacle.

10. Eve's Deception

Some say, when discussing the Fall, that Eve was deceived, therefore all women are more easily deceived and need the superior objectivity of men to do Bible study and make decisions.

There is no question but Eve was deceived. A major issue is whether she had the discernment to know better. Obviously she did to some degree because she quotes God's commandment back to the serpent (Genesis 3:3). It appears she was deceived into thinking that God was with-holding good from her, that she could get away with eating the fruit and not die. After she ate and did not die it even appeared the serpent was right. Haven't we all doubted God's goodness and been taken in by Satan's lie that we can get away with something without being caught? Men seem just as vulnerable as women.

In fairness, it appears that Eve was more susceptible to Satan's deception because she had apparently gotten everything second-hand from Adam, whereas Adam had gotten his instruction directly from God. Eve had not even been created when God told Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. There is also evidence from scripture that Adam was present when the serpent was tempting Eve and Adam took the passive role and said nothing. That may be one reason why God held Adam more guilty than Eve. Adam also set the precedence for male passivity.

Another problem with the traditional interpretation of women being inherently gullible is that it lays the blame on God for creating the only "perfect" woman intellectually deficient. Which is worse; to be deceived or to sin willfully? According to scripture the sin is nature, our propensity to sin with our eyes wide open, was first passed on through Adam, "*For if by the transgression of the one (Adam) the many died . . .*" (cf. Romans 5:19; I Corinthians 15:21, 22).

Note too who was attacking Eve; Satan himself. I have had enough experiences dealing with strong demonic entities to know that dealing with the ruler of all demons, Satan, is no small matter. Eve was beguiled by Satan. Adam was tempted by his wife. She was not nearly as crafty or powerful as Satan.

Adam's sin was then passed on to all people, male and female. If Adam's sin passed on to all his offspring, why wouldn't Eve's sins have passed on to all humanity as well? I am not making light of the women's responsibility, but to make a generalization which indicts all women as clearest thinkers in our world have been women. Sure, some women seem like *air heads*, but then I've known some men who have some *vacant rooms* upstairs too. Sadly, in both cases, it is often cultural conditioning or an act or role they feel compelled to live out.

While there are many exceptions, as a whole, women are often more intuitive and in touch with their feelings (come more from the heart), while men are often more analytical (come more from the head). If the fall of Adam and Eve tell is anything it is that **both our intellect and emotions fell** and became corrupt. That is why it is dangerous to point fingers and accuse the opposite sex of their failings. That is what the Pharisees did. Their cold analytical legalism led them to despise women and what they could offer—just as Jezebel in the Old Testament let her feelings dictate her behavior to the destruction of many.

What is the solution?—for both men and women to counter balance each other—to allow our *hearts* to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and for us to have the *mind* of Christ as revealed through His work. It is important to realize, neither men nor women have a corner on the truth; only God.

Lastly, women, when given the chance to be properly educated, and give cultural permission to freely speak, show no signs, of inferiority to men. And men, you do NOT want to know the results of the latest national intelligence test between men and women!

11. Proverbs 31

In Proverbs 31, the ideal wife is anything but a doormat. In fact, the term “Good wife” (verse 10) in Hebrew literally means, “women (capable) of strength.” She is shown tremendous respect from her husband. He has confidence in her (verses 11, 12). She has the freedom to work outside the home and to be in business (verses 16, 24). She has her own money (verse 16). She is not dumb. —“*She opens her mouth in wisdom*” (verse 26). She teaches others (verse 26b.). She is also active in ministry outside the home (verse 20).

As food for thought, how would your church handle a whole congregation full of women like the Proverbs 31 woman? How would such women be allowed to exercise their wisdom and teaching abilities? Would any man in his right man shun such wisdom?

CHURCH HISTORY

Church history provides us with many eye-opening examples of how, in the first two centuries of the church, women figured prominently in leadership. For example:

1. Women were ordained until the Council of Laodicea (363 A.D.) forbade it. Note: this was after the pagan influence hit the church when Emperor Constantine declared Christianity to be the state religion. It was during this time at one church council that the “Arian” view won out and the deity of Christ was denied for a time. As a point of interest, the second Council of Nicea (787 A.D.), was convened by a woman, Empress Irene of France, to deplore the worship of icons.

2. In the Catacombs of Rome, prior to 200 A.D., there are pictures of women presiding over the Lord’s Supper.

3. Tertullian (200 A.D.) spoke of women “clergy.”

4. The church historian, Dodwell, wrote, “The spirit of prophecy was given . . . even to the time of Constantine men had these gifts; yea and women too.”

5. Justin Martyr (125 A.D.) wrote, “Both men and women . . . had extraordinary gifts of the Spirit.”

6. Phillip had four daughters. The church historian Eusebius called them “evangelists.” Luke called them “prophetesses” (Acts 21:9).

7. The Montanists (of whom Tertullian was one) said, “Priscilla and Maximilla, ladies of rank, served as evangelists over a wide extent of country.” Women were elected by Montanists as “deacons, pastors, president-presbyters, or bishops.”

8. Historically speaking, the role of women in ministry diminished as the church grew colder and paganism infiltrated the church.

9. The argument, “Well, for centuries women haven’t been allowed to teach . . .” is the same type of “argument from history” that the church used for hundreds of years to teach that salvation was by works. By that line of reasoning the Reformation should never have taken place. The issue is not, “How long has it been practiced?”, but rather, “Is it scriptural?”

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS:

One must acknowledge the fact that all Bible translations for almost 2,000 years have been translated solely by men. How would we men feel if all the passages in the Bible referring to men had been translated by women, especially if the women had some cultural biases against men? Like it or not, biases do exist. Women have legitimate grounds for complaint in the way Phoebe is called a “helper” in Romans 16:2 when in fact the Greek word implies a “*leader,*” “*ruler,*” or “*protector,*” or when I Timothy 2:12 is translated as “*I do not allow a woman to teach . . .,*” versus “*I am not currently allowing a woman to teach . . .,*” or changing “*Junia*” (a female apostle) to read “*Junius*” (a male apostle) in Romans 16:7.

In some cases translators have not identified women when the original text does. For example, Isaiah 40:9 literally reads, “*O Woman, that publishes good tidings to Zion . . . O Woman, that publishes good tidings to Jerusalem . . . say unto the cities of Judah, behold your God.*” Overall, I think the translations we have on the market today are very good. However, I do question the translation of a few key passages relating to women. I honestly believe the translators were trying

to accurately translate what *they thought* the passages were saying. I just question how much their own biases colored their work.

OTHER COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS

1. Doctrine Should Not Be Taught In Terms Of Potential Misuse

Church doctrines should never be taught of potential misuse. For example, we do not cease teaching on prophecy just because some people carry it to absurd extremes. No, we are to teach what is Biblical, and let the chips fall where they may. This principle also applies to those who say, “If women are allowed positions of authority, they’ll end up running the whole show.” That sentiment ignores the question of what is Biblical. The truth is that both men and women abuse power. (Look at the world political to see what men have done.) Also, if men are supposed to be innately equipped to be the best leaders, as some say, then why would the men be so weak and non-assertive that women could come in and automatically take over everything? It would seem that if those in authority were allowing the spirit to lead, empower, and fill them, this matter would not be a problem.

What many men fear, I think, is that women will adopt the same domineering attitude of control that they themselves have had. Psychologically speaking, most people project into others the qualities they least like in themselves. Maybe such men had domineering mothers and they view all women that way.

I sometimes wonder if that is why many men are so up-tight about women in leadership. Are the men afraid the women will treat them as if they have treated women? Selfishly, many men do not want to share leadership and consider women’s point of view. Plus, for the some men, it is threatening to work with women who, in some instances, outshine them.

From my limited experience in churches where women are treated as equals, I have not seen women running the show. Rather, things are run on the basis of spiritual gifts. Those who are best qualified, whether male or female, tend to end up in the right positions. Ironically, it is those churches who most suppress women that I have observed women trying to run things behind the scenes by being manipulative.

2. Showing Love

Who best reflects love, sensitivity, compassion, and nurturing in our society? Generally speaking, most would agree that women do. Men have been taught to repress their feelings, to be cautious about expressing physical or emotional affection, particularly to other men. Culturally speaking, men are often the poorest equipped to show the attributed of leadership which God esteems the highest—love.

3. Woman Beside Man

For those who insist that a woman is not to be over a man, may I point our that to be treated as an equal is not to be *over*, but *beside*.

4. Contemporary Woman

Because some women have children at home or work part time, there are a few years in the lives of many women where holding down church responsibilities would not be easy. That, however, is not to say they are unfit, any more than workaholic men who becomes over-committed with their work and thus are poor church leaders.

It is true that the issue of a woman’s right to serve in leadership is not as pressing to some women, especially during the child-bearing years. However, such needs are often felt most acutely by single women, and by women whose children have left home. What do out churches have to offer such women, many of whom are highly gifted?

Our society has drastically changed in the last few years. More and more women are marrying later in life, pursuing careers and higher education before getting married. Will the church provide adequate places of ministry for these women, women who are highly educated and do fit

the stereotypic women's role of 50 years ago? Many women become active in parachurch groups simply because those in the church refuse to utilize the tremendous talents and gifts these women possess.

Some say that the reason Paul did not let women teach was primarily cultural. If, for sake of argument, the cultural argument is valid, then we in the 20th century churches *need to reevaluate our position in light of our culture*. Women now teach and administer at our universities and in all states of society. Sadly, many non-Christians dismiss Christianity because of its perceived chauvinistic attitudes toward women. Will the church be one of the last places to give women freedom to maximize their gifts and talents?

5. Dynamic Tension

Paul *taught that all things are lawful for the believer*, which, it would seem to me, would grant freedom to women to minister (I Corinthians 10:23). However, Paul went on to say that not *all things are expedient*, especially if our freedom causes a weaker brother or sister to "stumble." (Parenthetically, a legalistic is not considered a "weak" brother. Jesus was forever offending the legalists of His day.) There needs to be that dynamic tension, that balance, where, unlike the radical feminists, we continue to put other's welfare before our own, where love is motivation, even if it means living with situations that are less than ideal. On the other hand, there is a time and place to speak the truth in love so that Biblical change might occur, even if it means offending certain people. Where that line is I cannot say. I do believe that as we seek God, He will lead us in the most loving ways to bring about change where needed, even if it seems slow in coming some days.

6. Operating Within or Without the Existing Structure

Some advocate, and to a degree rightly so, that a woman can function as an elder or deacon, but that it is not necessary for them to have the title to go along with the work they perform. However, there are some pitfalls to this type of thinking.

To whom are these women accountable? Who is praying for them, encouraging them in their work? If they are performing the work of an elder or deacon by ministering to the needs of people within the body, then why refuse them the title and recognition? If God has given them such leadership or ministry gifts, why not acknowledge it, both as an encouragement to the women, and so that others within the congregation will know who to turn to when needs arise?

As Peter Wagner in his excellent book, *Prayer Shield*, points out, in his experience more men seem to have the spiritual gift of leadership while women more often seem to have nurturing, shepherding gift of pastor. Not all women with the gift of pastoring are called to the *office* of pastor, but some are. The question is, where do they fit in? What if God raises up a Deborah (one of the judges in Israel) within your congregation?

Further, as almost anyone knows who has held a church office, it is easier for ministries and works to be implemented and performed if they are sanctioned by those in church leadership. Why handicap women who are doing a good work by failing to give them the emotional, spiritual and leadership support they need?

7. Built-in Sensitivity

There is a spiritual deficiency that often occurs in churches that have all male leadership. Unless there is a built-in structure for women's voices to be heard, the men in leadership are often unaware of the real needs of the women within their congregation. I would hazard a guess that in most male-dominated churches those in leadership are not adequately addressing the needs of the housewife, the new mother, the career woman, the divorcee, the widow, the mother of small children, etc. because they are oblivious to many of their needs. ("Out of sight, out of mind.")

I would venture a guess that the total active membership in most congregations is 60-75% female. Probably 70% or more missionaries are women. Those are large percentages of women to have so little representation from among themselves.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The whole male-female issue is not an open and shut case as far as I am concerned. I still have unanswered questions. I am not saying that my position is free of difficulties. It isn't. But, I hope that by now I have demonstrated that the traditional church position is not without its difficulties either, some of which are the inconsistent ways that I see many churches trying to live out their traditional views. They dismiss all teachings on slavery, yet adhere to parallel passages in the role of women in the church.

They teach that women are "priests" with access into the Holy of Hollies and yet say women are unfit to act as ushers, or speak before the congregation irrespective of their spiritual gifts. Women are allowed to proclaim Biblical truths and teachings from the pulpit as long as it is in the form of music, but they are not permitted to speak from the same pulpit. Women are deemed fit to prepare communion but unfit to serve it. They are considered capable of preaching and teaching men as missionaries, but cannot teach men on the other side of the ocean in their own homeland. I think Christ would call such practices hypocritical (cf. Matthew 23 for similar attitudes). They "*strain out a gnat and swallowing a camel.*"

Some say, "If we let women have a larger part in the service we might cause hard feelings or it might be divisive. We don't want to offend anyone!" Certainly, no one wants to cause needless misunderstanding or division. However, the issue is what is *scriptural*.—That is like saying, "Let's not address slavery. We don't want to offend anyone." That is fine as long as you are not a slave. But what about the women who are hurt by our present system, when in many cases, they are more gifted and better equipped to do work of Christ than many passive or over-committed men who only serve half-heartedly? Did Jesus keep from speaking the truth when He knew it would offend people? No.

Further, what sort of role models are we giving to our children, especially girls? Does God love boys and men more because they get to do most of the *important* stuff? Are women second class citizens in God's kingdom? The absence of women in most of our services, except for music, is glaring. Apart from teaching Sunday School, cooking, and performing musically, what role models do girls, or women for that matter, have for ministry within the church? What if their gifts and talents do not lie in teaching children, cooking, or music? What if instead their gifts were administration, teaching, or leadership? As the father of two girls, these are important questions to me.

I speak as one who used to hold to the traditionalist's view. The switch for me has not been easy. My male ego has had to swallow some pride and admit to my own cultural conditioning. However, after many discussions and much study and reading, I am personally convinced from scripture that my current view makes the most sense.

If I am wrong, I am open to being shown where I have gotten off track. I think I have raised some valid points which those in mainstream Christianity should face. Personally, I know how judgmental I was of Christians who believed women should be church leaders before I changed my position. I wrote most of them off as *liberals or uninformed*. A major reason that I found changing my position so hard was because I didn't want my friends to think of me as liberal or uninformed.

Lest we drift into accepting *time-honored errors*, may I point out that *truth* is ultimately to be the deciding factor. I know that what I've been saying runs counter to much of the teaching prevalent in Christian circles today. There is, however, much discussion under way, and many changes are taking place. Many faculty members at leading seminaries are coming to accept, on scriptural grounds, that women should be given freedom to exercise their spiritual gifts before the whole congregation. It takes courage to go against popular beliefs.

Anytime some time-honored tradition is challenged there is confusion and intensity of emotion (i.e., slavery, the Reformation, etc.). The role of women is no different. This topic will be harder for some of us to objectively deal with than for others, depending on how much vested interest we

have-or how much our pride gets in the way.

It is like the story of the chicken and the pig talking about having breakfast. The chicken recommended “ham and eggs,” at which the pig protested. What was a “take-it-or-leave-it” matter for the chicken was a “life-related issue” for the pig.

Unfortunately, because it does not touch men as directly, many men remain both uninformed and unconcerned about the role of women in the church, as though ignorance were bliss. Were the roles reversed I bet we’d see a lot of men shouting “foul.”

You owe it to yourself to make an honest effort to understand both sides of this issue. I especially encourage you men reading this to be strong enough and gracious enough to reflect on the position presented in this booklet. Whether you agree or disagree at this point is not important. That you show love, understanding and an openness to knowing the truth is important. Scripture admonishes us to “*test all things, hold fast that which is true*” (I Thessalonians 5:21). Honestly weigh the evidence presented within this booklet, as best you can, according to your understanding of scripture, and then be obedient to what you believe God’s Word teaches. Pray that the Holy Spirit will make known to you the truth.

For those who want to throw away all role distinction, especially within marriage, think again. Scripture makes some pretty strong non-cultural arguments to the contrary. Male leadership within the home, I believe, is still taught. C.S. Lewis pointed out that Satan often throws lies into the world in pairs. If he doesn’t catch us at one extreme he’ll try to catch us at another. The road of truth has deep ditches on either side.

Lastly, may we do everything in our power to prevent Satan from polarizing us over this issue. There is enough division in the ranks as it is. Where there is sincere disagreement, let it be in love. I am very aware that it is before our Lord that we must each give an account (Romans 14:4). Let us refuse to break fellowship over such issues. We can agree to disagree in love. May we refrain from labeling one another as “liberal,” or “chauvinist,” or “the enemy.” We are members of the same family. Satan and untruth are the real enemies.

May He who is Grace grant us gracious attitudes and behavior toward one another as we seek to live out our scriptural convictions before God.

May He be glorified!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*. Baker Book House, 1985. (I recommend this book very highly. He has by far the best treatment on “headship” that I have seen. If I could suggest one book to read on the biblical role of women, it would be this book.)

2. Jesse Penn-Lewis, *Magna Carta of Women*. Bethany Fellowship, 1975. (This is a small book packed with loads of information.)

3. Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We Are Meant To Be*. Word Books, 1974. (This is one of the first scholarly books by evangelical women on this issue. I agree with about 95% of it. You can tell it is a very emotional issue for them, but I still recommend it highly.)

4. Williams, *Apostle Paul and Women in the Bible*. Gospel Light, 1977. (An excellent treatment of every single passage where Paul mentions women, it helps balance out some of the extreme views people attribute to Paul. Unfortunately, this book is out of print at the time of this writing.)

5. Evans, *Women in the Bible*. Inter-varsity Press, 1983. (This book is not always easy reading, but it is one of the best overall books I have found on this subject.)

6. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, Was, and Women*. Herald Press, 1983. (This scholarly work presents both sides of each of these four issues and lets the reader decide.)

7. Richard Foster, *Money, Sex, and Power*. Harper and Row, 1985. (It is an excellent treatment of each subject, but does not deal extensively with women's issue.)

8. *NASV Exhaustive Concordance*, Broadman Press, 1977. (I suggest that you do some personal word studies so that you can see for yourself how often and in what was certain words are used.-eg., "helper," Romans 16:2.)

9. Patricia Gundry, *Heirs Together*. Zondervan Pub., 1980. (She has keen insight into the marriage relationship and a thorough study of many key passages from both the Old and New Testaments.)

10. Ronald and Beverly Allen, *Liberated Traditionalism*. Multnomah Press, 1985. (While they reach a more traditional conclusions than I am not personally comfortable with, they nonetheless have many valuable insights on the women's issue.)

11. Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1971. (This delightful book points out that gender is not as important as personhood; that God calls us first to be people.)

12. Patricia Gundry, *Neither Slave Nor Free*. Harper and Row, 1987. (Excellent.)

13. Peter Wagner, *Prayer Shield*. Regal Books, 1992. (While this does not directly address the women's issue, it gives excellent insight into women's spiritual gifts and the tremendous need to intercede for one another, and especially for those in positions of spiritual leadership.)

Numerous other books and articles could be listed, but these are some books I have found most helpful. Please note that all of the books I list are by respected evangelical publishers, with the exception of Harper and Row. Many have the endorsement of Christian leaders who hold to Biblical inerrancy, yet who feel as I do regarding the role of women in the church.