

# Woman 101

## What Every Christian Man Needs To Know

By John R.D. Anderson

September 23, 2008

In this short paper, I attempt to debunk the traditional understanding of a Christian woman's role. I do this because the traditional story of Adam and Eve and several passages in the New Testament, as presented by men, have done untold damage to women. This paper gives the "she said" side of the "he said/she said" argument.

### Epiphany

As I read two books, *God's Word to Women*, by Katharine Bushnell, and *The Magna Charta of Woman*, by Jesse Penn-Lewis, my mind regarding women was changed. Almost all of the information you will read here comes from these two sources plus the Bible. Bushnell was a Hebrew and Greek scholar. Her work is seminal but is difficult to follow. Penn-Lewis, then, presented Bushnell's ideas in an abbreviated form that is easier to understand but still maybe not simple and linear enough for the male brain.

What I have written is a still briefer version for a modern audience. As a male, I especially write to the Christian males who think that they have a God-given right to exercise authority over females. Obviously, what you will read here does not cover all of the information presented in the two books; so, refer to them for more detail.

## Lost in translation?

Here are some translation facts to keep in mind when reading the Bible. Translators can skew the meaning of the text inadvertently, or even on purpose. Since translation bodies were made up entirely of men, verses pertaining to female roles and functions were colored by a male viewpoint.

The Hebrew of the Old Testament looks different from today's Hebrew. Ancient Hebrew was written in all capital letters and did not have any spaces between words or any punctuation marks. In addition, the written words did not have any vowel letters. Also, words with double consonants were sometimes written with just one consonant. For example, Genesis 1:1 could look like this:

NTHBGNNGGDCRTDTHHVNSNDTHRTH

As you can see, this left room for some interpretation in certain portions.

Later in time, during the Babylonian captivity, Hebrew was not being spoken. The pronunciation was in danger of becoming lost. As we know, words cannot be pronounced without vowels. The scribes decided to insert four consonants, "a, h, w, and j," to stand for the vowel sounds in the language. This added confusion to the written text, however, because it wasn't always clear if the "h, w, or j" should be understood as a consonant or a vowel. Still later, around 700 AD, a system of vowel signs was added to the written language which took the place of the added consonants and helped to reduce the confusion.

The original Hebrew text was divinely inspired. However, the later additions to the written text were not necessarily so. Actually, the men who made these additions were opponents of Christianity and despisers of women.

The New Testament, written in Greek, did not have all of the Old Testament problems, because it employed vowels. It does, however, have translation difficulties, mostly because it had no punctuation marks. And, just as the Old Testament, it was translated solely by men.

## The class ceiling

There are basically three passages in the New Testament that contain Paul's controversial teachings about the ministry of women in the church: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11, and 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2. There are other related verses also, such as Paul's speaking to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5.

The understanding of these teachings is often based on what happened in the garden of Eden as seen in Genesis. The way that men have translated all of these passages, in effect, has taken away the full ministry of women and caused men to treat them as being in a different lower class.

Let's look at the translation of these passages and how we have understood them. When we realize that there is another way to view the translations, we can realize how the devil has been able to hold sway over the church for centuries, even millennia.

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible. I use *italic font* to emphasize portions of text, *not* to show words added by the translators.

# 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14:23–34

## ***Real prophets speak***

Should Christian women speak or not speak in church gatherings? Paul is clear on this matter:

If therefore the *whole church* be come together into one place, and *all* speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if *all* prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of *all*, he is judged of *all*: (1 Cor 14:23–24)

(Note: Many understand *prophesy* to mean “to foretell.” This is actually a secondary meaning of the word. In the Bible, prophesy simply means “to speak for God.”)

The whole church includes the women. They, then, must be considered as part of the “all” to whom Paul is referring.

Next, Paul writes more about the results of everyone prophesying, about what participants bring to a meeting (psalms, teachings, etc.), and further instructions. As he concludes, he states this:

For ye may *all* prophesy one by one, that *all* may learn, and *all* may be comforted. (1 Cor 14:31)

This proves that Paul expects both males and females to speak in church meetings. Not only so, it also shows that he expects all to learn in the meetings, which would include the men learning from the women.

## ***The Judaizers insert themselves***

In the same chapter, after encouraging *everyone* to speak in plain language in a meeting, does Paul then reverse himself and tell the women to be silent in the meeting? This seems absurd, but here are the verses that lead people to think it:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for *it is not permitted unto them to speak*; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (1 Cor 14:34–35)

How can this be explained? Actually, from chapters 5 through 14, Paul seems to quote several times from a letter sent to him by Judaizers in Corinth, and this is one of those quotations. (The Judaizers were a group of Jewish teachers, who professed to be Christians, but who wanted to make sure that Christians observed Jewish traditions in the Oral Law and some of the rituals of Moses, like circumcision.)

So, in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul firstly presents a picture of everyone speaking in a meeting and the wonderful results that can ensue when everyone can participate. Then, he quotes from the position of the Judaizers (that women should be silent). Finally, after quoting their position, he attacks the Judaizers for their presumption:

What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. (1 Cor 14:36–37)

## ***Paul's text doesn't bear "the marks"***

Paul, writing in Greek, did not have quotation marks to use like we have in modern English.

Prof. Sir. Wm. Ramsay says, on this subject: "We should be ready to suspect Paul is making a quotation from the letter addressed to him by the Corinthians whenever he alludes to their knowledge, or when any statement stands in marked contrast either with the immediate context or with Paul's known views." (Bushnell, para 205)

If we do not use this method of interpretation, how can we reconcile Paul's words written just three chapters before?

But every woman that *prayeth or prophesieth* with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. (1 Cor 11:5)

In other words, in chapter 11, Paul says that women can pray and prophesy; then, in chapter 14, he says that women should be silent. This makes no sense until we understand that Paul, in chapter 14, was simply repeating the Corinthians' question while giving his answer to their question.

## ***The long arm of the Jewish law***

Did Paul really expect women to ask their husbands questions at home instead of speaking up in a church meeting? Did Paul expect that Christian women who were married to pagans and Jews were to get their spiritual guidance from their non-Christian husbands? What about those women who were not married? Would he leave these women with no spiritual help at all?

As proof that Paul was quoting the Judaizers, 1 Cor 14:34 states that the law says that women are not permitted to speak but were to be in subjection. The problem is this: No where in the Old Testament or the law of Moses are we told that women should not speak.

Where did the idea of women not speaking come from? It is found in the teachings of the Jewish rabbis. These teachings were considered to be the Oral Law. The Oral Law was not God's Law; it consisted of items added by men. The written record of these teachings, *The Talmud*, states that it was "a shame for a woman to let her voice be heard among men." Therefore, silencing women was an addition to God's law that was invented by the male rabbis. It was a part of the Judaistic tradition that Jesus and Paul both spoke out against.

## ***Don't forget your place***

The Judaizers wanted to bring the Christians back to the Jewish traditions which kept women subjugated to men. Women constitute about half the body of Christ. To try to silence half the Christian witness is the devil's ploy to limit the growth and spread of the gospel, which contains the good news that in Christ there is no male or female—we are all free!

In Corinth, there were those who disputed whether Paul was really an apostle. In addition, some criticized him and his companions for traveling with a woman. In Acts 18:18, we find that Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, had recently left Corinth with Paul.

So, why were the Corinthian Judaizers bothered enough by Priscilla's time in Corinth to write to Paul with questions about a woman's place in the church? Well, she was from Asia-Minor, where women were held in high esteem. There, under the Roman Empire, women presided at games and were even magistrates. It is quite possible that Priscilla went to Corinth with her husband, expecting to be treated as an equal with him. This would have grated on the Judaizers and prompted their letter.

In addition to the context of history, the Bible gives us a further hint as to how women functioned in the early days. A year after Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we find that Philip's daughters were prophesying:

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. (Acts 21:9).

If Paul really meant that women should be silent, wouldn't we expect that this noted evangelist and his daughters would be falling in line with the apostle's supposed command, which had been given a year earlier? The fact that Philip's daughters were freely speaking is an important example of women who were speaking as prophets.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:3–16

### ***A veiled threat***

Another Corinthian question put to Paul was about the veil or covering. In Jewish religious practice, it was only the *married men* who veiled themselves, signifying that they were under condemnation and guilty of sin. Therefore, the question of that day was this: Should Christian wives wear veils like their husbands? Paul, while answering this, was also taking the opportunity to try to stop the men from covering.

With this understanding, Paul's writing makes more sense. For a married man to cover his head was to dishonor Christ. Why? Because Christ had atoned for every man's sins. There is no more guilt, so there is no more need to wear a veil, the sign of condemnation and guilt:

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. (1 Cor 11:3–4)

Paul continues by stating what was in accord with the *Oral Law of the Jews*: For a wife not to veil would be a dishonor to her husband. Paul, then, repeats what the Judaizers expected if a wife did not veil: She was to have her head shaved. This would be the greatest humiliation possible for a Jewish woman. In fact, her husband might be compelled to divorce her if she was seen without a veil. In light of these possible consequences, Paul concludes that a woman surrounded by this kind of a cultural expectation could veil herself:

But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. (1 Cor 11:5–6)

It makes sense here that Paul was simply referring to the Jewish culture of the day. It does not make sense that the apostle would actually want to use shearing as a punishment for the women in the church.

## ***A cover-up?***

Paul next declares that the married men should not veil themselves, as they had been doing, according to the traditional Jewish custom. He states that the woman (Eve) was taken out of the man. The woman was made to help man walk with God. She was not made for the man to abuse or to be his slave or to be his inferior. She was his partner, of his flesh and bone. The woman was formed because of the man's need for a companion:

For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. (1 Cor 11:7–9)

In the next verse, the translation has a problem: The word *on* should be translated *over*. This change reveals that the woman should have power over her own head about whether to wear a veil or not:

For this cause ought the woman to have power [over] her head because of the angels. (1 Cor 11:10)

Paul goes on to say something like this: You Corinthians have asked if women should be treated differently. I have answered your question about veiling; but, actually, the truth is that both male and female are in Christ. Therefore, there is now no difference between the two, because they are one in Christ:

Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. (1 Cor 11:11–12)

## ***Serpentine marks?***

In the next verses, the question marks and word order *supplied by the translators* causes a problem:

Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? (1 Cor 11:13–14)

A better way to translate these verses is to remove the question marks and change the “Is it” to “It is” and the “Doth not” to “Nor does”:

Judge in yourselves: It is comely that a woman prays unto God uncovered. Nor does nature teach you that if a man has long hair that it is a shame to him.

In various human cultures, long hair for the man is customary. In fact, even in the Jewish culture, long hair could be expected when under a vow. Also, male animals like the lion have long hair whereas the females do not. It does not make sense for Paul to state the opposite. Now, after translating these as statements instead of questions, these comments make sense and fit in with the verses that follow.

Since Christian women might have difficulty unveiling in public worship because of the Oral Law, the culture, and the force of tradition, Paul notes that their long hair is already a veil for them:

But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for *her hair* is given her for a covering. (1 Cor 11:15)

Finally, Paul writes about the custom of wearing veils and concludes that the churches do not have the custom:

But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God. (1 Cor 11:16)

In summary, Paul forbids men to veil and permits women to veil. However, he guards against this permission being construed as a command to veil by showing that, ideally, the woman should unveil before God, man, and the angels. He shows that there is special propriety in women unveiling themselves when addressing God in prayer. In the end, Paul declares that there is nothing for a woman to be ashamed of in showing her hair and disavows veiling as a church custom.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:8–15

### ***Paul wasn't fiddlin' around***

Another passage, as it relates to women, needs to be clarified, and that is 1 Timothy 2:8–15. To be understood, it is important that these words be considered in their historical context. Paul was writing to Timothy from a prison in Rome. Nero was a tyrant on the throne and was known for his brutality toward Christians. His wife, a Jewess, was against the Christians. Paul knew that the church in Rome had been annihilated by Nero, and he didn't want to cause any unnecessary harm to come to other Christian women in other churches. Therefore, he did not encourage the believers to do anything that would cause them to intentionally run counter to the Jewish culture and get them in trouble with the authorities.

With this in mind, let's look at the verses. Verse 8 tells the men to pray. Does verse 9, then, tell the women to adorn themselves in like manner? This makes no sense. Again, the punctuation is at fault. Paul intends that women pray everywhere like the men. He goes on to say that the women should dress unobtrusively. Because of the treacherous times, women should not call attention to themselves by their dress. In addition, *shamefacedness* is an improper translation. The word means "reverence" or "godly fear."

I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness [godly fear] and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array. (1 Tim 2:8–9)

Another interesting comment is that this verse also further proves that Paul was not telling the women to wear veils: Why would he have told them not to braid their hair if their hair was covered by a veil? Actually, the veil came into being as a mandatory item for women when the Koran became popular in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

## **Who's the professor now?**

Verse 10 is very intriguing, because the word *professing* actually causes this passage to prove the opposite of the traditional understanding. It means "I deliver a message to." It is the word from which we get the word *angel* or *messenger*. This word was used in Greek society to describe what political candidates did when they came before the public to describe what they intended to do in order to gain supporters. For Christian women, it can mean to gain supporters for Christ by sharing the gospel with those who will receive the gift of godliness.

But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. (1 Tim 2:10)

So, these verses in Greek are read literally this way (with punctuation added):

I am intending then to be praying the men in every place lifting up benign hands apart from anger and reasoning similarly also women. In raiment decorous with modesty and sanity to be adorning themselves no in braids or gold and pearls or vesture costly but which is behooving to women professing reverence to God through works good. (1 Tim 2:8–10)

## **Like real estate—context, context, context**

But what about a woman *learner*? Here, Paul suggests to Timothy certain measures which can reduce the possibility of persecution against the church. If a woman wants to learn, do teach her, but let her learn in quietness and subjection. The word *silence* is better rendered *quietness*. Because of the then current situation with Nero, Paul did not want a woman to teach or to be domineering over a man, but he didn't have a problem with a woman professing the gospel and praying. In the original Greek, the thought that a woman would "usurp authority" is not in the text. Instead, the idea is that a woman would not be domineering over a man.

Let the woman learn in [quietness] with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to [be domineering] over the man, but to be in [quietness]. (1 Tim 2:11–12)

Two things should be kept in mind here: Paul was writing his personal feeling to Timothy in a private letter; he was not writing commands to a church. Secondly, he was not necessarily stating an absolute for all time; he was likely writing about how he would be taking care of women during a time of great persecution against the church. Actually, for Paul to allow a woman to simply learn was a big step forward away from the Jewish culture of the time.

## **Not a point of pride**

After stating how a woman should learn during that period of history, Paul continues with a reference to Genesis. Eve was formed second; therefore, she was the younger one, both physically and socially. When approached by the serpent, she was "thoroughly deceived" (literal Greek). In other words, she sinned due to the serpent's powers of deception. On the other hand, the man sinned willfully, not being deceived at all.

For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being [thoroughly] deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved [through *the* Childbearing], if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (1 Tim 2:13–15)



Therefore, what men have chosen as a point of pride (that of not having been deceived), is actually a manifestation of Adam's greater sin, his willful disobedience.

The woman, as the victim, was given a promise, although it is difficult to realize, because the little word *the* is left out. She shall be saved through *the* Childbearing. The child would be the coming savior, Jesus Christ. This makes more sense than to think that every time a woman births a child that she is saved. This would mean that some women are saved many times while others are not saved at all.

The aftermath of what happened in the garden did not mean that women would remain under the consequences of Eve's deception any more than it meant that men would remain under the consequences of Adam's willful sin. Christ's sacrifice was enough to free all men and women for all time—not just the men.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal 4:4–5).

## Genesis 3:1–4:1

### *Adam points the finger*

Now, let's get back to the beginning and consider what really happened in the garden of Eden. As we know, God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Later, the woman came on the scene, and we can assume that Adam passed this information on to her. Afterwards, the serpent came along and tempted the woman to eat of its fruit.

From Genesis, then, the narrative continues:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband *with her*; and he did eat. (Gen 3:6)

What many have not realized is that Adam was with her when she ate. Adam may have even been present when the serpent tempted her. Why didn't Adam speak? It was his responsibility to guard the garden. Was Adam lax in his responsibility, allowing the serpent to get into the garden? However you read the account, Adam bears in the responsibility for what happened (Crabb).

Later in the text, God confronts Adam with his sin, and Adam blames the woman. In so doing, he also indirectly blames God for giving her to him:

And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. (Gen 3:11–12)

Not only does Adam bear responsibility for the sin of the woman, he tries to deny his responsibility by blaming others, thereby compounding his sin.

## ***Eve throws the first punch***

Next in the account, God confronts the woman with her sin, and she confesses:

And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. (Gen 3:13)

Eve could have blamed her husband as he had done to her. Instead, she exposes the serpent's character as being that of a deceiver and admits that she had eaten. In speaking to God about the serpent, in the serpent's presence, she "threw the first punch." This response may be why God selected Eve and her offspring to war against Satan.

Next, God turns to the serpent and pronounces his fate:

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. (Gen 3:14)

Eve did not go out from Eden under a curse, rather she went out with a promise from God that her offspring would crush the serpent's head. We see this in what God spoke to the serpent:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; [her seed] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen 3:15).

In effect, God agreed with her treatment of the serpent and stated that He would continue to put enmity between them. He would also put hostility between her spiritual offspring and the offspring of the serpent. The war had begun! Now, women, for the rest of history, would be a special focus of the devil's attacks! Is it any wonder that the devil has done his utmost to keep women subjugated, muzzled, and shut out from certain ministries?

God, then, returns to the woman with a word for her:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Gen 3:16)

This verse will be discussed later in full, as it has been used as a major weapon in the war against women.

## ***Adam of dust***

Again, God speaks to the man. This time, He tells him about his grim future because of his disobedience:

...cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee.... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Gen 3:17–19)

Man, in death, would return to the dust. And, remember, it was dust that the serpent would eat. There was no hope for Adam except for his association with the woman. The real promise of hope for the future was to her, not to him. Adam could not bear the past; the woman would bear the future.

## ***Eve of faith***

Right after Adam was told that he would die, he gave the woman the name, Eve, which means "Living."

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.  
(Gen 3:20)

We should not consider that Eve was simply the mother of all human beings; otherwise, who is to be considered the seed of the serpent in verse 15? Therefore, Eve was promised that she would be the mother of the *spiritually* living. Adam, on the other hand, was promised death. By these promises, Eve became to Adam his promise of a future.

Finally, God expels *the man* from the garden:

Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. (Gen 3:23)

The woman was not expelled from the garden as the man was. A legitimate viewpoint is that the woman was spiritually living and could have stayed. But, she turned from God to follow her husband out of the garden.

Eve expresses her dependence on God and her belief in the coming one:

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. (Gen 4:1)

Was Eve the first person of faith, a believer in God's promise? The Hebrew text hints at this. In this verse, she says that she has gotten a man from Jehovah, the coming one. With this proclamation, she accepted and agreed with God's promise of a coming savior. Eve was spiritually living; and her seed, the Christ, would crush the serpent.

## ***Who ya gonna turn to?***

Now, let's go back and look at Genesis 3:16. The translation errors in this verse have wreaked havoc on women for centuries. These errors have caused most of the misunderstandings concerning what Paul wrote about women. Through these mistranslations, the teachings of the Jewish rabbis were finally able to infiltrate the church, to the detriment of all. Here is the King James version:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Gen 3:16)

Note the following translation problems:

(1) What appears as "I will greatly multiply" is from the Hebrew that literally means "a lying-in-wait," which can be understood as "a snare." Therefore, the serpent was lying in wait for the woman as a snare.

(2) The meaning of *conception* is not in the original manuscript. The word should be translated *sighing*. In Hebrew, the two words are similar, but *sighing* has two fewer letters than *conception*. The translators assumed that the word must be a contraction and subtracted two letters rather than use the word *sighing*.

(3) The word *desire* was substituted in place of the word *turning*. From 285 BC until 500 AD, most translations used the word *turning*. Then, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a monk named Pagnino, who was influenced by the Jewish rabbis, translated the word as *lust*. From then on, almost all English versions followed suit, using the word *desire* or a word with a similar sense. This change to *desire* gave the passage a sexual overtone.

(4) The use of the word *shall* gave the passage a sense of an edict from God to the woman. God seemed to be saying something like this: "Because you sinned, you *must* desire your husband, and he *must* rule over you." Actually, God was simply stating what she was beginning to do and what would be the result if she continued on that path: She was turning away from God to her husband, and it would result in her husband ruling over her.

## ***The serpent is lying***

Based on the foregoing discussion, Genesis 3:16 can be better translated as follows:

Unto the woman He said, "A snare has increased your sorrow and your sighing.  
In sorrow shall you bring forth children. You are turning to your husband, and he  
will rule over you."

This verse has been used by expositors for centuries as the authority from God to keep women in submission to men. This has been a terrible injustice for all of society. Because of this mistranslation brought in by the same people that Jesus and Paul spoke out against, men have felt justified in repressing women and treating them like servants.

Over time, women have gained freedom in various parts of society; however, many Christian women remain under the dominion of men. When men have read Paul's words about women, many have brought to bear their understanding of Genesis 3:16 and thought that they were supposed to rule women. Actually, as Christians, we are not supposed to rule anyone else.

After we put aside traditional understanding, what we read in Genesis shows that God cursed the serpent, condemned the man to a life-long struggle culminating in death, promised the woman spiritual life and a coming seed, and expanded the hostility that she initiated with the serpent.

There was no curse put upon Eve. The idea of Eve being cursed originated during the time between the Old and New Testaments (referred to as the "days of mingling") when Jews promulgated the Oral Law and tried to reconcile their customs with those of the Greek pagans. Not only was there not a curse, God did not even charge Eve with disobedience as He did Adam.

## **It's a matter of se-man-tics**

Here are some words that have been misunderstood when it comes to the question of woman in the Bible.

### ***Subjection***

When Paul used the word *subjection*, he used it in the sense that we are all to be subject one to another. This is the New Testament revelation. The Judaizers took this truth and molded it to fit with their Oral Law and tradition, applying it to women to be obedient to men as servants.

The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. (NASB, 1 Cor 14:34)

The verb translated “to subject” is from two Greek words: *hupo*, meaning “next after” or “under” and *tasso* meaning “arrange.” Therefore, the word Paul used meant “to arrange after” or “arrange under.” In fact, the noun *subjection* is not found in the Greek language except in the New Testament. We can infer, then, that Paul coined this word to describe a posture that is particular to those who are believers in Christ.

What is to be a characteristic of believers that caused Paul to coin a new word? The sense of this word can be defined as “yielding one’s preferences to another, where no principle is involved, rather than asserting one’s rights.” Paul used this word to express how we should comport ourselves with one another:

*Hupotasso* yourselves one to another in the fear of God. (Eph 5:21)

Likewise, ye younger, *hupotasso* yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be *hupotasso* one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. (1 Pet 5:5)

Paul told the Corinthians to submit to those who helped him; and, by the way, some of the ones who helped him were women (see Rom 16:3, 12). Therefore, Paul would have the Corinthian men to subject themselves to some women:

That ye *hupotasso* yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth. (1 Cor 16:16)

Also, to the wives, Paul wrote the same thing:

Wives, *hupotasso* yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. (Eph 5:22)

As we can see, Paul uses the same word with the wives that he uses for everyone else in the body of Christ. Therefore, we know that he does not expect a mere servile obedience from the wives.

Another observation about the word *subjection* in the New Testament is this: When it is used regarding relationships between men, it is never understood to refer to a servile obedience of one man to another. Thus, it should be interpreted the same way for women.

In addition, the New Testament’s meaning of *hupotasso* is to yield one’s preferences rather than assert one’s rights. Therefore, this word does not refer to the rule of Adam over Eve mentioned in Genesis 3. In other words, Christian wives are not to be forced to obey or to be ruled over by their husbands. That happened in Old Testament times, because Eve turned from God to her husband. The *hupotasso* in the New Testament is a yielding of the right to choose. To the extent that grace works in a husband’s heart, he does not want to lord it over his wife (nor does she want to control him). This result is a fruit of the Spirit.

## ***Obedience***

The word *obey* in the New Testament is used to apply only to servants and children. Those with servants and children can expect them to obey. As far as husbands are concerned, the word *subjection* is always used with wives, except in one instance referring to an Old Testament situation:

Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. (1 Pet 3:6)

Sara did obey her husband in this life or death situation, even though what he asked her to do was wrong. It is very interesting that in regard to this same couple, God also tells Abraham to obey Sarah.

And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. (Gen 21:12)

This shows us that obedience within a marriage was on the side of both partners and involved a mutual respect.

## **Headship**

In 1 Cor 11:3–14, Paul uses the Hebrew word *aner*, which means “adult male or husband.” So, in those verses, Paul is not teaching that all males should be over all females. Because of the context, several of the instances refer to a husband’s relationship to his wife. This is further confirmed by the fact that Paul was writing to the husbands, the ones who wore the veils. He did not want the husbands to wear them because of what the veil symbolized. In effect, the men were denying the effectiveness of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross.

So, the Bible does say that the husband is the head of the wife. But, in what sense is he to be the head? He is to be the head in the same way that Christ is the head to His church, in a way of loving care and nourishing supply to foster her growth in love:

...holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. (Col 2:19)

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:15–16)

In Ephesians, Paul elaborates on how husbands should treat their wives. He echoes Jesus’s words about the two greatest commandments—loving God above all and loving your neighbor as yourself. Here, all-encompassing love is the overriding theme:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.... Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband. (Eph 5:25, 28, 33)

The husband is to love his wife to the extent of laying down his life for her as Christ did for the church. A husband’s love for his wife is to be as limitless as Christ’s love for His church. Paul makes the comparison even more practical for the husband by saying that he should love his wife as he loves his own body. When the husband loves in this way, the outcome will be that the wife will be respecting her husband.

## Diakonos

We should come to the New Testament without the colored glasses of the 17<sup>th</sup> century English translation as regards the position of women. When we do, it becomes obvious that there was a double-standard applied when translating the Greek word *diakonos*. The word occurs 30 times in the New Testament and was translated as follows: 3 times as “deacon,” 7 times as “servant,” and 20 times as “minister.” Whenever *diakonos* referred to a particular man, it was translated “minister.” For example:

But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things:

However, when *diakonos* referred to Phoebe, a woman, the same word was translated “servant.”

I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: (Rom 16:1)

Apparently, the translators just could not imagine having a female deacon. One thing that this verse does show is that Paul referred to a female minister in the same way as a male minister: as a *diakonos*. For Paul, there truly was no male or female in the body of Christ. When the situation warranted it, however, Paul did express in his personal letter to Timothy ways in which females could be protected from the cruelty of Nero’s reign.

## There’s trouble in paradise

Many men trace the problems on the earth back to the first woman. They feel that everything was just fine until she messed it up. The problem with this view is that it is not according to the Bible. Actually, we can infer that God had problems with Adam in the garden of Eden before the woman ever came on the scene:

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. (Gen 1:31)

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. (Gen 2:18)

Notice that after God created everything, including Adam, He said that it was very good. Later, however, God said that it was not good for the man to be alone. Since the situation went from very good to not good, it seems that there was already a problem in paradise with Adam before the woman came along.

## Who’s helping whom?

When things were not good, God decided that Adam shouldn’t be alone and that He would make a help meet for Adam. What exactly does help meet mean? The footnotes in the Net Bible for these two words, *help* and *meet*, have this discussion:

Traditionally “helper.” The English word “helper,” because it can connote so many different ideas, does not accurately convey the connotation of the Hebrew word עֵזֶר (*’ezer*). Usage of the Hebrew term does not suggest a subordinate role,

a connotation which English “helper” can have. In the Bible God is frequently described as the “helper,” the one who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, the one who meets our needs. In this context the word seems to express the idea of an “indispensable companion.” The woman would supply what the man was lacking in the design of creation....

The Hebrew expression כִּנְגֶדּוֹ (kÿnegdo) literally means “according to the opposite of him.” Translations such as “suitable [for]” (NASB, NIV), “matching,” “corresponding to” all capture the idea....

By analyzing these words in context, we find that man had a problem being alone, and things were not good as a result. In other words, the man was needy; he was lacking. The man proceeded to look at all of the animals but did not find any that complemented him as a suitable partner. So, God took of Adam’s side, flesh and bone, and made a woman for him who would be an indispensable complement and counterpart.

So, guys, that wife of yours is not a subordinate who must be kept in line. She is your complement, because you are lacking and needy. She was given to you by God to assist you as an equal, a fellow traveler in the journey after God.

## **Women ministers in the Old Testament**

From the very beginning, in Genesis, woman had a high status in society. This was her God-given status.

### ***Eve—counterpart, living promise***

Eve was Adam’s counterpart, his equal, his match, his partner, his completion, who was to help him to know God. In addition, she declared war on the serpent and was given the promise by God that her seed would crush the serpent. She was, then, Adam’s hope for a future.

### ***Sarah—prince***

God changed Abraham’s wife’s name to Sarah, which means a female prince or chieftain. This shows that women could be heads of tribes. In those days, kinship was reckoned through the woman, and matriarchy was a very strong tradition. (Even countries were led by females, like Cleopatra in Egypt.)

## ***Women—ministers at the Tabernacle***

In the Bible, we see that women ministered at the Tabernacle:

And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the lookingglasses of the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. (Exo 38:8)

Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. (1 Sam 2:22)



But, you ask, “Where does it say that the women were ministering?” What we have to realize is that the gender bias was so strong in the church that the King James translators rendered the word for *minister* as *assemble*.

The King James version of the Bible, however, was actually an improvement over the Greek Septuagint, which was greatly influenced by the Jewish rabbis. Instead of *assemble*, the Greek Septuagint used the word *fast* in Exodus; and, in 1 Samuel, it just left out the phrase entirely! Apparently, the rabbis could not stand the idea of a woman ministering at the Tabernacle and purposely changed the translation to suit their views.

### ***Miriam and Huldah—prophets***

In the Old Testament, women were in the highest order of those who were teaching, that is to say, they were prophets. For example, there was Miriam:

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. (Exo 15:20)

And there was Huldah:

And the king commanded...Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us. So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess...and they communed with her. And she said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel....” (2 King 22:11–15)

Here we read that the king, who was male, sent the male priest and other men to ask the female prophet what to do about the word of the Lord.

### ***Deborah—judge***

And then there was Deborah, who was not only a prophet, she was also a judge. In addition, she led Israel to battle when a man was afraid to do so.

And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. (Jud 4:4)

## **Women ministers in the New Testament**

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ purchased freedom for all, including women. As the struggle continued between Eve’s seed and the serpent’s, the devil was able to blind men from seeing woman’s true role in the kingdom of God.

## ***Phoebe—maintainer***

The Bible speaks of Phoebe using the Greek word, *prostatis*, meaning literally “one standing before.” In Greek usage, the word was used for a champion, leader, chief, protector, or patron. In fact, it is the noun form of the verb which is translated “rule” in 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12, and 5:17. In the following verse, however, the word could not be translated as “rule”; otherwise, she would have been a ruler of Paul:

That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer [*prostatis*] of many, and of myself also. (Rom 16:2)

We can derive from this that the word in 1 Timothy should not be translated “rule.” This same verb form of the word is used in Titus 3:8 and 14 and translated as “maintain.” We find then, that a man is not to “rule” his house and children but to maintain them, to lead them, to take good care of them. This is the function that Phoebe had with respect to the church in Cenchrea. This is the same function that the verses in 1 Timothy apply to overseers, elders, and deacons.

Phoebe was a great help to the apostle Paul and was well respected by him as playing a leading role. In secular history, we find that Phoebe is mentioned as being well-known to the Greeks, the Romans, and even the barbarians.

## ***Priscilla—evangelist, teacher***

Paul met Aquilla and Priscilla in Corinth and lived together with them for a year and a half.

And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. (Acts 18:2)

Then, together, they went to Ephesus. There, they met Apollos, who was learned and mighty in the Scriptures, but who only knew the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila took him and expounded to him the way of God more perfectly. From this, we see that Priscilla was a teacher who could instruct a man who was “mighty in the Scriptures.” Priscilla was probably more the teacher than her husband; otherwise, according to the prevalent attitudes in the culture, she would probably not have been mentioned at all.

Paul calls Priscilla and Aquila his fellow-laborers, recognizing them as being fellow evangelists and teachers.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: (Rom 16:3)

Note that Priscilla is mentioned first, which is true of most of the verses that mention her and her husband. Also, very noteworthy is that Priscilla was functioning in a speaking capacity with Paul during the same time period in which some expositors say that Paul was teaching that women should be silent! This, of course, would be nonsensical.

## ***Philip’s daughters—evangelists***

Philip’s daughters were prophetesses.

And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. (Acts 21:9)

Eusebius, the church historian, writes that these women functioned “to preach Christ to those who had never yet heard the word of the faith, and to deliver to them the record of the Holy Gospels.”

## ***Junia—apostle***

Paul was not so close-minded like many Christian men are today regarding the place of women in the church. Junia is an example:

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my [kinfolk], and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (Rom 16:7)

Some expositors think that the name should be Junius and refer to a male, but the male form does not appear in any biographical dictionary of Greek names, whereas the female form does. Also, Chrysostom, a Greek, born about 350 AD, wrote about her, “Oh, how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should even be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!”

## **Women witnesses for Jesus**

One thing that men often overlook is that without women, much of what we know about Christ’s birth, crucifixion, and resurrection would not be known. Why? Because Jesus entrusted Himself to women. For example, without the virgin, Mary, we would not know about the appearance of the angel prior to Jesus’s birth. Also, we would not know about Him being conceived of the Holy Spirit.

## ***His crucifixion***

Regarding the crucifixion, it was the women who were in attendance at the cross, as the men had previously forsook Him and fled.

But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. (Matt 26:56)

The disciple, John, however, was at the cross for a period of time before Jesus committed His mother to him and he took her away. What he witnesses at the cross, he writes in his gospel. The events at the cross recorded in the other gospels are based solely on the testimony of three women:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25)

After John took Jesus’s mother home, there were only two Marys left to hear the following words of our Lord and preserve them for us:

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

“Today thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46)

“Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

In addition to these significant quotes, the women also described the following events while John was gone: how people railed at Jesus, how the thieves interacted with Him, and how He received the vinegar.

## ***His burial***

After His death, His body was prepared for burial, and the women were there and witnessed how His body was laid in the tomb:

And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. (Luke 23:55)

When Joseph of Arimathea took care of the body, they were able to see how it was wrapped; and, when Joseph left, the women were still at watch:

And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. (Matt 27:59–61)

## ***His resurrection***

Following this, the two Marys were witnesses to the miraculous resurrection events—not Peter or John or any of the other disciples:

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men.

But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word.

And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.” (NKJV, Matt 28:1–10)

We are indebted to these women who did not flee but pursued their calling. What did the women see of the resurrection: They saw how the body was laid; they saw how the tomb was sealed. They saw the angel appear and roll away the stone. They saw the guards fall as dead. They saw that the body had come through the grave cloths and left them as they were the night before. Because of their love

and commitment, we know these marvelous details of His resurrection. Jesus chose them to bring to light these aspects of the gospel, and they did.

## Women in church history

In addition to the record of the Bible about women, we also have the testimony of historians about the functioning of women for Christ. Here are a couple of references.

Justin Martyr, who died about 150 AD, wrote that “both men and women were seen among them who had the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit of God, according as the prophet Joel had foretold.”

Dodwell wrote “the gift of the spirit of prophecy was given to others besides the Apostles: and that not only in the first and second, but in the third century—even to the time of Constantine—men had these gifts; yea, and women too.”

Women taking the lead in the church lasted only a few centuries after the birth of Christianity. Women in these roles were diminished as the Roman church took over and established a formal hierarchy. Women were ushered out at the same time that the Jewish rabbis influenced the translations of the Bible with an anti-female perspective. The Judaizers, therefore, were able to defeat Paul’s teaching that in Christ the differences were crucified, and they were successful in relegating women to subservient roles.

## The Spirit is poured out on all

Over the time period of the Old Testament, woman lost her God-given status. Eventually, after the close of the Old Testament and during the days of mingling, the devil had brought woman down to the point that she was considered no more than man’s property.

The body of Christ cannot reach full-growth while half of its members are not exercising their gifts. If women do not pray or prophesy in the assemblies of the saints, the whole body is retarded in its growth.

Remember, the outpouring of the Spirit to prophesy was on women as well as men. This act of God Himself from heaven sanctions women to speak for Him in public:

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were *all* with one accord in one place.... And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon *each of them*. And they were *all* filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1, 3–4)

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: (Acts 2:17–18)

This not only occurred at Pentecost but also during revivals throughout the ages since. To say that only men have spoken by the Holy Spirit is to deny the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy and to deny the working of the Holy Spirit throughout church history.

In most secular venues, women have been set free to participate equally with men. Shamefully, however, in the church, many women are still shackled by the ancient views of the Judaizers, thereby limiting the effectiveness of the church and hampering the spread of the gospel. To modern men and women, a gospel that enslaves women is no gospel at all.

## **Bibliography**

Bushnell, Katharine. *God's Word to Women*. Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2003.

Crabb, Larry. *The Silence of Adam*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995.

Penn-Lewis, Jesse. *The Magna Charta of Woman*. Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975.

Woman 101