

The Role of Women in God's Plan for the Church

From Bible times until the present day

A study by

Dr Trevor R Allin

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God's plan for women in the church

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First published edition 17th September 2014

This revision: 14th February 2020

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For many years he taught a range of languages up to “Advanced” level standard in state schools in England and in Germany, and in state-recognised schools in Scotland and Spain. He also worked full time over a period of many years supporting and inspecting qualified Modern Language teachers and giving them professional development training. Teaching and examination materials written by him for French, German and Spanish at a wide range of levels, up to and including “A” Level, have been published by mainstream U.K. educational publishers and examination boards, for whom he has written and marked examination question papers.

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¹ CLIE, 2019 See <https://www.clie.es/curso-de-griego-biblico>

² Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my brother and my wife for their feedback on earlier versions of this paper, and L and P for their assistance with its translation into Spanish and the helpful feedback that they gave me during this process. It has improved both the content and the format of the current version.

17th September 2014

In April 2018 I discovered the web page of Marg Mowczko, a theologian based in Australia. She has carried out many studies on the Bible's teaching about women, and the few articles that I have been able to read in recent days have seemed to me to be well founded on thorough research. I quote from two of her articles in chapter 7. More articles by her can be seen here: <https://margmowczko.com/> (consulted on 9th April 2018).

I am grateful to her for further comments that she has sent me on this article, and incorporate them at the appropriate points. Her comments have improved this article, for which I thank her.

2nd September 2018

INTRODUCTION

Until less than 50 years ago, full-time Christian ministry in churches and pulpits of almost all denominations was staffed 100% by men. This is still the case with some denominations, and the Roman Catholic Church in fact still forbids women to become priests.

However, over the past few decades, many Christian denominations have experienced radical change. Having permitted women to become ministers, many of them are now undergoing a major change of balance, and it would appear that in many of them soon more than 50% of full-time ministers will be women.

Those who turn to the Bible for guidance are split. Some say that all ministry must be equally open to both men and women. Others say that women "must keep silent in church". Both quote the Bible. Who is right?

Regardless which side of the teaching they support, many people have had their minds made up for years, perhaps for their whole lives, and they often approach this topic with a sense of outrage and anger at the statements and actions of those on "the other side" of the argument – and an argument it often is, conducted with bitterness, seeking to "score" points by quoting favourite Bible verses, while refusing to listen to the Bible verses quoted by the other side.

The aim of this article is to look briefly at this important topic and to examine some of the key Bible verses that are quoted by one side or the other. Are they contradictory? Have some verses been misunderstood? If so, which verses?

Wherever we start from, we need to pray at the beginning of this study that God will give us grace and humility, that He will soften our hard hearts and let the Holy Spirit speak to us.

We must not use the Bible as a weapon to attack others, nor must we "mine" it to find verses to reinforce our own prejudices. We must, on the contrary, recognise that no-one knows everything there is to know about God and about the Christian faith. So we must open our hearts to be willing to learn something new from God, even if the Bible does not always say what we would like it to say.

This paper does not claim to say everything that there is to say on this important topic. The first chapter looks briefly at women in the Old Testament. Chapter two looks at how Jesus treated women. Chapter three looks at women on the Day of Pentecost, and chapter four looks at women in leadership roles in the New Testament church. Chapter five looks at the New Testament model for "priesthood". Then come two much longer chapters that study in some detail two New Testament passages that are frequently misunderstood: 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Finally, we look at an often-ignored passage in which we are told that some men are to keep silent in church, before reaching conclusions about the Bible's teaching on this essential subject.

CHAPTER 1

Women: made in God's image – the same as men

To start at the beginning – or pretty near to it – in Genesis chapter 1 we read

"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (vv 26-27, NIV)

So the female, as well as the male, was created in God's image.

Women – commanded to rule – the same as men

And in fact God's command to "subdue the earth" and to "rule over it" (Genesis 1:28) was to the woman as well as to the man: note from the beginning of verse 28 we see that God gave the command to both of them, not just to the man.

Women – in a subordinate role as men's "helpers"?

Some men seek to imply that women must have an inferior role to men, as in Genesis 2:18 God refers to Eve as "a helper suitable for" Adam. However, Hebrews 13:6 tells us "The Lord is my helper", which does not make God in any way inferior to us. In fact, the concept of God as our helper goes back to the book of Genesis (49:25), and is a repeated theme in the Psalms (e.g., 10:14, 27:9, 118:7) and elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 18:4, Deuteronomy 33:29).

Thus we see that being a "helper" is in no way to be inferior or subordinate.

Women leaders in Old Testament times

Of course, male-dominated middle-eastern society did its best throughout most of the Old Testament period to suppress women and take power away from them, even though there are notable cases of women who played a key role in God's plan. Moses' sister Miriam is called a "prophetess" (Exodus 15:20), as is Deborah (Judges 4:4). Deborah is also described as doing the work of a judge (Judges 4:5) and she was clearly braver than her commander Barak (who is held up as an example of faith in Hebrews 11!) – see Judges 4:8-9:

"Barak said to her, 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.'⁹ 'Certainly I will go with you,' said Deborah. 'But because of the course you are taking, the honour will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.' So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh." (NIV)

We could of course also refer to the faith of Ruth, the prayer of Hannah and her song of praise recorded in 1 Samuel 2, and the brave actions of Esther, who saved her nation.

Selective quoting from Scripture

Some church leaders are delighted to refer to bad women in the Bible such as Delilah and Jezebel, but they do not at the same time refer to the many more numerous bad men, starting with Cain and going through a long list of leaders and kings who "did evil in the sight of the Lord", for instance, Ahab (1 Kings 16:30), but also many others, even including Solomon (1 Kings 11:6).

God's plan for women in the church

So we have a situation where selective quoting from Scripture does not give us a balanced view of the role of women in God's plan.

CHAPTER 2

How Jesus treated women

Coming to the New Testament, we see that in a male-dominated society Jesus chose 12 men, but that there were also many women who ministered to him (Luke 8:1-3).

When we read his miracles, we see that he healed both men and women equally and praised both men (e.g. Matthew 9:2) and women (e.g. Matthew 9:22) for their faith.

In his parables and other teaching He was careful to address women and men equally. So he spoke of a man going out to sow seed (Mark 4:3ff) or planting mustard seed (Matthew 13:31) but also of a woman putting yeast in the dough when making bread (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:21). He told a story of a shepherd who found one lost sheep (Luke 15:4-6), and then went on by telling of a woman (obviously of considerable financial means) who had ten silver coins, lost one, and rejoiced when she found it (Luke 15:8-9).

When our eyes are open to this, we see it all over the place in the gospels. In Luke 13:16 He described one woman as a "daughter of Abraham". Some recent "politically-correct" paraphrases translate this "*child* of Abraham", to eliminate the gender reference, but a major part of what Jesus was implying was that the Jews were wrong when they described the men as "sons of Abraham", but tried to exclude the women from God's blessings. In fact a Jewish prayer of the time included the words, "I thank you, Lord of all creation, that You did not make me a woman." The Pharisees were shocked not only because Jesus healed on the Sabbath, but because He chose to call this woman a "daughter of Abraham", making her equal to the men.

It is paradoxical that some of those who are most opposed to the equality of women are other women. In fact, we even see this in the New Testament. When Jesus went to the house of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), He taught those who were gathered to hear him, and

'Mary ... sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"' (verses 39 & 40, NIV)

Here was a woman who was saying, "the woman's place is in the kitchen, preparing the food. The teaching is for the men. Come on, Jesus, put her in her place!"

Did Jesus say, "Quite right, too, Martha. Now then, Mary, don't you bother your pretty little head with all this teaching. You don't need it anyway, because I won't let you teach anyone. You're only a woman. Off you go to the kitchen, dear."?

No, that is not at all what He said. He spoke out against the gender stereotyping of first-century Jewish society. This is what we read

' "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." ' (vv. 41-42, NIV)

So Mary had chosen the *right* thing to do. Jesus had told His followers that what they had heard from Him in secret they should proclaim from the rooftops (Matthew 10:27). He wanted women to hear the same message, too. We must conclude that He wanted them, too, to proclaim the gospel.

Women: the first witnesses for Christ

The pre-eminence given to women by Jesus is quite remarkable.

The first witness, the first preacher and the first evangelist

The first person to whom Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah was a woman (John 4:26). He even sent her *to tell a man* (John 4:16). Kenneth E Bailey³ calls her “a witness” (p. 208, 215), “the first woman preacher in Christian history” (p.201) and “an evangelist” (p. 215).

We should not be surprised that when Jesus rose from the dead, the first person in the whole world that He chose to appear to was a woman. (John 20:11-15, Matthew 28:1-10). In fact, one of the strong arguments for the reliability of the resurrection accounts in the Bible is that if they had been made up, no-one would have said that the first witness to the resurrection was a woman. They would at least have made it a man, probably even a Jewish priest, the High Priest, Herod or even Pontius Pilate.

The first apostle

Not only were Mary Magdalene and some other women the first people to see the resurrected Jesus, He even told them to go and tell the men that He had been raised (John 20:17). This is why some people call Mary Magdalene “the first apostle”, since “apostle” merely means “sent one”. So she was “the apostle to the apostles”.

Just as we would expect from a male-dominated society, where the testimony of women was not taken seriously, the men refused to believe what the women said. In Luke 24:9-12 we read,

‘When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.’ (NIV)

But the women turned out to be right. They were the first eye-witnesses to the resurrection, the first believers in the resurrection and the first people to tell others about it.

³ Bailey, Kenneth E, “Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes”, London: SPCK, 2008

CHAPTER 3 Women on the Day of Pentecost

Given Jesus' commission to Mary Magdalene, it is not surprising when we find in Acts 1 that the women were there, along with the men, waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit:

'They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.' (Acts 1:14, NIV)

After this description, the author does *not* go on to say, "Of course the women didn't actually pray; they just sat there in silence and watched the men praying" – and indeed there is no evidence that would support any such a claim. On the contrary, the plain meaning of Acts 1:14 indicates that both men and women were praying.

But were the women (unlike the men!) restricted to praying *silently*? What follows immediately thereafter in the book of Acts shows that the women, too, were praying and praising God out loud.

Acts 2:4 states:

'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.' (NIV)

The 1984 edition of the NIV goes on to say,

'Utterly amazed, they [the Jews visiting Jerusalem] asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?"' (Acts 2:7, NIV)

This is, however, a mistranslation, since the word "men" is not present in the original Greek. The original Greek text states: οὐχ ἰδοὺ ἅπαντες οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ λαλοῦντες Γαλιλαῖοι; ("ouch idou hapantes houtoi eisin hoi lalountes Galilairoi"⁴), which, translated, means, 'Behold, aren't all these people who are speaking Galileans?' We know from Acts 1:14 that among "all these people" there were both men and women.⁵

However, our thinking has often been conditioned by decades of reading such mistranslations. In fact, most English translations of the New Testament are full of references to "brothers", in spite of the fact that the original Greek ἀδελφοὶ ("adelfoi") means "brothers and sisters". *This is not some 21st century feminist "political correctness" on my part, but the fact of the meaning of the Greek word.*

So on the day of Pentecost the women, as well as the men, were heard by the crowds that gathered outside the house (Acts 2:6).

It is extremely significant that Peter didn't apologise for this. He didn't even keep quiet about it and hope that the Jews wouldn't notice that women, as well as men, were prophesying.

On the contrary, he drew attention to the fact that women were there with the men speaking out loud God's message to a mixed public consisting of both men and women – and he justified it by reference to prophecies (Joel 2:28-29) that had declared that precisely this would happen.

⁴ An alternative way of indicating the sounds of these words could be "ooch idoo hapantes hootoi aysin hoi lalountes Galilairoi", in which "ch" is pronounced as in the Scottish word *loch*.

⁵ The 2011 revision of the NIV corrects this mistranslation and correctly reads: 'Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans?'

The fulfilment of prophecy that women would have an equal role with men

Thus the role of women is given great prominence in the first-ever sermon of the Christian church.

Quoting from the prophet Joel, Peter pointedly says:

'In the last days, God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. "'

He was saying, "God's promise is not just for men, but for women too." He continues the quotation from Joel with the words "'Your sons and daughters will prophesy".' (Acts 2:17)

He goes on to say,

"Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:18)

It is clear from this that on the day of Pentecost both men and women were prophesying – out loud and in public.

Of course, for Israel there was nothing new in women prophesying in public to mixed gatherings of men and women. Theologian Margaret Mowczko states,

'my understanding was that women prophets, such as Miriam and Deborah, were accepted as such and that they might speak publicly, just as many of the male prophets did.'⁶

Peter thus repeated and emphasised the Biblical foundations for God's way of working: women should be treated on the same footing as men, entitled to speak both in the gatherings of God's people and to non-believers, both men and women, "declaring the wonders of God" (Acts 2:11, NIV).

Peter could easily have started his quotation from Joel 2 at verse 29b: 'I will pour out my Spirit in those days' (NIV), delicately and deliberately missing out the references to women. However, he chose not only to quote from the preceding phrase

'Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (NIV)

but from the previous verse, too:

'I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons **and daughters** will prophesy.' (Joel 2:28, NIV)

He thus said three times over that women, too, were prophesying and exercising gifts of the Spirit of God. It is reasonable to conclude that he would have not quoted from these particular verses unless:

- a) the women were prophesying out loud
- b) he was seeking to justify this fact, which might have been shocking to some of the people present that day.

The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost has been recognised by the church throughout its history as the beginning of the church and an indication of God's way of working with humanity. Part of this way of working included giving gifts of the Spirit and a ministry to both women and men. From that point on, for the first three centuries of Christianity, women served God on an equal footing with men. It was only in the fourth century that men prohibited women from exercising the same ministries as men.

⁶ Private communication to the author of this article. Links to Mowczko's website are given elsewhere in this article.

CHAPTER 4

Women in leadership positions in the Church and in the Community in the New Testament

“There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”

A key New Testament verse that teaches about the ministry of men and women is Galatians 3:28, which says that

‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’

This verse focuses on the three great cultural differences in the world of that day – that of race (which also implied religion), that of social class and that of gender – and says that in Christ none of these differences are valid: all believers are equal as regards rights and ministries.

Priscilla – a teacher of men and women and a church leader

Later in the book of Acts, we find that one of Paul’s fellow-workers was Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila. (Acts 18:18). One of the remarkable details concerning Priscilla is that in a society in which the husband would always be mentioned first, and the wife would at best be named after him, if at all, in most New Testament references to this couple, Priscilla is named before Aquila (Acts 18:18, 18:26, Romans 16:3, 2 Timothy 4:19). Aquila is only named first twice: when the couple is first introduced (Acts 18:2) and in one letter (1 Corinthians 16:19). The cultural implication is that Priscilla was the principal teacher of this husband-and-wife team. Both Priscilla and Aquila are called “my fellow-workers in Christ” (Romans 16:3), without any distinction being made between them.

Priscilla, together with her husband, even taught a *man*, Apollos, and so successful was their teaching that he subsequently became an evangelist and teacher of the gospel (Acts 18:24-26).

Four female prophets

We are told almost casually that Philip the evangelist had four daughters “who prophesied” (Acts 21:9) This was clearly something that was viewed as routine and normal, not requiring explanation or justification.

Women church leaders and workers in Christian ministry

In Colossians 4:15 Paul sends greeting to “Nympha and the church in her house.” Are we meant to assume that she merely lent her house for the church to meet in, but hid in the kitchen while they were there? Knowing what Jesus said about Martha and Mary, this seems unlikely.

When we read Romans 16, we find a large number of names of fellow-workers and church leaders that Paul sent greetings to, nearly half of them (eight out of seventeen people) are women, and – even more significantly – of these “those described as contributing most to the

churches are *seven women but only five men*", as observed by the well-known theologian Eldon Jay Epp.⁷

In Philippians 4 the Apostle Paul writes about two women, Euodia and Syntyche, and says that "these women ... have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life." (Philippians 4:3, NRSV)

The verb that the apostle uses is συναθλέω ["sunathléō"], the Greek word from which the English word "athlete" and the phrase "do athletics" are derived. The first syllable of the Greek word, "sun", means "together with". In other places Paul described the work of the evangelist as being like that of an athlete (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 2 Timothy 2:1-7, especially v. 5).

It is clear that these women were not hidden in the kitchen, preparing the food for their husbands, but on the contrary that they were participating fully in the preaching of the gospel and the instruction of new believers. Paul says that they were members of the team of "συνεργῶν μου" ["sunergōn mou"], which means "people working together with me". The Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature⁸ defines this word as "fellow-worker", "co-worker" or "fellow-labourer". Paul asked the other leaders of the church in Philippi (see Philippians 1:1) to help these two women to resolve a misunderstanding that had arisen.

Paul repeatedly uses this same word elsewhere with reference to other Christian workers and leaders. For instance, in Romans 16:21 he applies it Timothy, in 2 Corinthians 8:23 to Titus, in Philemon 1:24, to Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke. In Philippians 4:2 he applies the same word to these two women.

A deacon in the New Testament church

In Romans 16:1 the apostle Paul commends to the Roman believers a lady by the name of Phoebe, whom he describes as "a deacon in the church in Cenchrea." The Greek word here, διάκονος ["diákonos"], is used both for men and women in the New Testament. Even though "deacon" did not have in New Testament times all the layers of meaning that it acquired in subsequent centuries, a "deacon" (or "deaconess") was a distinctive role with particular responsibilities within the New Testament church. In the case of Phoebe, it appears that she was the person entrusted with taking this letter by Paul to Rome – a task of considerable responsibility, especially in the dangerous and largely male-orientated society of the day.

For Romans 16:1, some translators and commentators prefer to translate the word "deacon" merely as "servant", which is one of the original meanings of the Greek word διάκονος ("diaconos"). However, this is not the normal Greek word for "servant" in the New Testament and these same translators and commentators are happy to translate the word as "deacon" when it is used with reference to men (for instance, in 1 Timothy 3:12). This merely reveals their prejudices. They are quite simply not

⁷ Epp was for many years Harkness Professor of Biblical Literature at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio and has been Visiting Professor of New Testament at Harvard Divinity School and President of the Society of Biblical Literature. The above quotation is from his book "Junia: The First Woman Apostle", Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005, p. 21 (emphasis in the original).

⁸ Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature", Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 3rd edition, 2000) (commonly referred to as "BDAG"), p. 969.

'rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15, AV)

or

'correctly handl(ing) the word of truth.' (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV)

Junia – a female apostle

Paul frequently wrote of women who worked hard in the work of the gospel. (e.g. Romans 16:6, 16:12). In fact, he even calls Junia an apostle (Romans 16:7). This is so clear that some translators have reacted by converting this name into a supposedly-masculine name, "Junias". The problem is that it is not masculine in the Greek original. Furthermore, there is no historic evidence that a male name "Junias" ever existed, while there is evidence in other documents and in inscriptions on tomb-stones that "Junia" was a commonly-used name for women.

The wives of the apostles

We see in 1 Corinthians 9:5 that when the apostles went on journeys, they were accompanied by their wives.⁹ Our knowledge of the historical and cultural context and of the rest of the New Testament leads us to conclude that these were not seaside holidays that the apostle Paul was writing about; many of the apostles travelled constantly, evangelising and strengthening believers. See, for example, Acts 8:14-15:

¹⁴'When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. ¹⁵ When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.' (NIV)

Did their wives just "go along for the ride", or did some of them have a ministry, too? We don't know, but the apostles were not travelling in comfortable cars with spare seats. It is clearly valid for couples in ministry to travel together, but Peter's justification in Acts 2 of women prophesying, Paul's justification of the same thing in 1 Corinthians 11 and the reference to Philip's daughters prophesying all give us strong indications that in New Testament times it was the norm for women to be active in speaking for God, and this in turn entitles us to believe that some of these wives may also have had a ministry, too.

Other women in leadership or with prominent positions of influence

This is not an exhaustive list. In Acts 16 we see that the first converts to Christ in Europe were women. Lydia was the leader of a group of women (16:13-14). After her conversion, her whole family – both men and women – believed and were all baptised, and Paul and his companions were then persuaded by this woman to stay in her home (v 15). After his release from imprisonment in Philippi, Paul and Silas refused to leave the city immediately, as requested by the authorities. Instead, they pointedly returned first to Lydia's house to encourage the brothers and sisters there (v 40).

Acts 9 tells us about another woman believer, Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, who was a leader in her circle of friends. After her miraculous recovery from death, the accounts of this event led many others to believe in the Lord (vv. 36-42).

In fact, the book of Acts repeatedly refers to the importance of women in the early church. Thus, we read that:

⁹ Margaret Mowczko states "I do not believe that the "sister-women" in 1 Corinthians 9:5 were necessarily wives." (Private communication to the author of this article) She explains this here: <https://margmowczko.com/believing-wives-female-co-workers-of-the-apostles/> (Accessed on 2nd September 2018.)

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- “more and more men and women believed in the Lord” (5:14),
- the Apostle Paul arrested both men and women ((8:3, 9:2, 22:4)
- in Samaria Philip baptised both men and women (8:12)
- on his final journey to Jerusalem Paul and his companions were received by believers, both men and women (21:5)
- “not a few prominent women” in Thessalonica, apparently from the synagogue, believed the message preached by Paul and Silas (17:4)
- and “a number of prominent Greek women” in Berea believed (17:12).

So it is considered important to report to readers the conversion of women, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

It is clear that women were an important part both of society and of the new churches that were being founded.

CHAPTER 5
A kingdom of priests
– or three classes of Christians?

One of the major problems for many Christian denominations arises from the totally non-Biblical division of Christians, starting in the fourth century A.D., into two classes: “clergy” and “laity”. The clergy require special training and must be “ordained” by a class of special Christian leaders who are usually given the title of “Bishop”. Those in power in the fourth-century church decided that only this new class of people, the clergy, were empowered to celebrate communion and certain other rites, and that church services should normally be led by clergy, who would do the public speaking. The fourth century church also decided that the “clergy” would wear special vestments, another idea that has no foundation in the New Testament nor in the practice of Jesus and His disciples, nor in the church during the centuries before the fourth century. Further, the fourth-century church decided to exclude women from ordination and from all leadership positions.

The whole of this concept of a special class of Christians is totally alien to the teaching of the New Testament, which teaches that there are different ministries, but not different classes of Christians. A simple reading of the teaching in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 makes this clear. So *all* Christians equally may ‘approach the throne of grace with confidence’ (Heb 4:16).

A key verse that clarifies the status of all believers is 1 Peter 2:9, which says:

‘you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.’

All Christians are part of that “royal priesthood”, and so do not need to have an “ordained priest” to approach God on their behalf. There *is* a mediator between humanity and God, but that mediator is not a “priest”, a “vicar” or any other special class of Christian. The *only* mediator is Christ (1 Timothy 2:5).

The priesthood of all believers is referred to in Revelation 1:5-6 and Revelation 5:9-10. In the latter passage, the 1984 edition of the NIV states:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”’

Does the Bible really say “you purchased men for God”? If we go back to the Greek, we find that the word “men” is not there at all. A more accurate translation would be “you purchased people for God”. The 2011 revision of the NIV corrects its mistranslation, providing the following rendering:

‘with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on earth.’

It is those “persons” – all redeemed people, both male and female – who have been made “a kingdom and priests to serve our God”.

God's plan for women in the church

However, most of traditional Christianity created and in many cases still enforces **three** classes of Christians, who have varying degrees of authority:

Ranking	Class	Authorised	May aspire to
1st	Clergy (men only)	to perform the most important rites of the church	the highest positions in their denomination.
2nd	Non-ordained men	Not authorised to perform these rites	become clergy if they meet certain criteria (including, for the Roman Catholic church, celibacy)
3rd	All women	Not authorised to perform these rites	Nothing

Thus, in many denominations women are *not even* second-class believers; they are in fact third-class believers. Such has been the success of those who set up and enforce these class divisions by an abuse of their power in the church that in some cases they even persuade women that this is right, and so Jesus' words about Mary to Martha (Luke 10:41-42) are ignored.

It is only because many denominations have adopted these anti-Biblical concepts that a lot of the arguments about the role of women arise, as men, who have given themselves positions of privilege and power, try to exclude women from the "top" class of Christians, the "clergy" – hence the arguments about women "priests" and women bishops.

For Christians who understand the Bible, the "ordination of women" is a non-issue, as all believers – whether men or women – have the same status before God and are equally members of the body of Christ. And all believers have a ministry. This is quite a shocking idea to many church-goers (both men and women), who want to "leave it to the professionals" and don't believe that they can share the gospel or the love of God, for they haven't been trained or ordained. It is sad that they are missing out on many of God's blessings, as they don't believe that God can work in them or use them.

But according to New Testament teaching and practice, although there are many different kinds of ministry, none is superior to any other, and no ministry is the preserve of men only.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul condemned the dividing of Christians into different groups and types of believers, saying,

'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.'¹⁰ (1 Corinthians 1:10) See verses 11-12 for more of the context.

¹⁰ NRSV. The NIV, 2011 revision, likewise starts with the words, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters." The Greek ἀδελφοί ("adelphoi"), the plural of ἀδελφός ("adelphós"), means "brothers and sisters". Some other translations (for instance, the New Living Translation) also show this. Older translations that merely put "brothers" are based either on a misunderstanding of the Greek original or on the assumption that the masculine plural can also be assumed to include the feminine, which may, perhaps, have been the case at certain points in the past. However, this is misleading and can no longer be justified in translations into English. See further comments on this above.

To hammer the point home, Paul asked

'Is Christ divided?' (1 Corinthians 1:13)

The question is not "Should women be ordained?"; it is, "What is the church doing to help all Christians to recognise the gifts that God has given them? What is it doing to encourage them to seek further spiritual gifts? (1 Corinthians 14:1) What is it doing to enable and indeed to encourage all believers to exercise the gifts that they have received?"

A sacrifice of praise

In the letter to the Hebrews, Christians are told,

'Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name.' (Hebrews 13:15)

Let us note a few things here. First, it is not through an "ordained priest" but "through Jesus".

Secondly, the sacrifice is not a religious ritual that can only be offered by a special class of Christians; it is "a sacrifice of praise". Just in case someone might misunderstand what this means, the writer goes on to define "a sacrifice of praise" further: it is "the fruit of lips that confess His name."

Are women to be denied the possibility of offering this "sacrifice of praise" which all believers are commanded to offer? Those who insist that they must remain silent do indeed try to prevent them from fulfilling this Biblical instruction.

CHAPTER 6
1 Corinthians 14:33-35:
Women praying and prophesying in church

Introduction

The words in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 puzzle many people. This is what they say:

'As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.' (1 Corinthians 14:33-35)

Is this meant only for the church in Corinth, or does it have a general application?

Some commentaries suggest that these words are merely addressed to the believers in Corinth and so do not apply to us. Writing about the first letter to the Corinthians as a whole (i.e., without explicit reference to 1 Corinthians 14:33-35), the highly-respected theologian Richard Bauckham¹¹ writes:

'1 Corinthians, for example, deals very specifically with problems in the church in Corinth at the time of writing, but it has proved valuable to very many other readers. Such readers read it appropriately when they take account of the fact that it was written to the Corinthian church. It can speak to them, but only when something of the context of its original addressees becomes part of the way it speaks to them.'¹²

In other words, we must not read 1 Corinthians without bearing in mind the meaning that it had for its first readers, in their specific situation, with the problems that they had, nor without bearing in mind the attitude of the Apostle Paul to them and to what they were doing and saying.

Another theologian, Michael J Kruger¹³, writes:

'it is also true that many documents within the New Testament have "occasional" dimensions to them, meaning that they were seeking (at least in part) to address particular situations within the first-century church.'¹⁴

Kruger balances this evaluation by stating next¹⁵:

'While the New Testament documents had occasional dimensions to them, we should also note that they were still intended for wider distribution.'

¹¹ Bauckham was a lecturer in and subsequently professor of theology in various prestigious U.K. universities over a period of more than 30 years during the last quarter of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, including fifteen years as Professor of New Testament Studies and Bishop Wardlaw Professor in the University of St Andrews. At the time of writing, he is a senior scholar at Ridley Hall in Cambridge, and a visiting professor at St Mellitus College in London. cf https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Bauckham, accessed on 12.12.15.

¹² Bauckham, Richard: "The Theology of the Book of Revelation" (part of the series "New Testament Theology", published by Cambridge University Press), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 23rd printing 2015, p.13.

¹³ At the time of writing, Dr Kruger is "President and Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA." – information taken from the back cover of the book referred to next.

¹⁴ Kruger, Michael J: "The Question of Canon", Nottingham: Apollos, an imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2013,p. 120, emphasis added.

¹⁵ fn 7 on the same page

What are the implications of these statements?

If it is the case that 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 applies only to the Christians in Corinth, then where do we stop in deciding which Biblical passages apply to us and which ones do not? Is

'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no-one can boast.' (Ephesians 2:8-9)

only for the believers in Ephesus, or is it for everyone?

However, with regard to these important verses in Ephesians 2, it must be pointed out that many commentators believe that the letter that we know as "Ephesians" was originally a circular letter that was intended to be read in all the churches throughout Asia Minor (an area that corresponds to modern-day western Turkey). This belief is supported by the fact that some of the oldest and most authoritative manuscript copies¹⁶ of the letter do not include the words "in Ephesus" in the first verse. If this is the case, Ephesians 1:1 reads:

'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints, the faithful in Christ Jesus.'

However, as early as the second century it was suggested by Tertullian¹⁷ that the letter "to the Ephesians" is the one that is referred to in Colossians 4:16:

'After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.'

Laodicea is only about 20 km from Colossae and about 225 km from Ephesus. The Apostle Paul and other first century Christians travelled – and sent letters – much greater distances than this, so that the letter "to the Laodiceans" could easily have been read in Colossae – and copied and taken to the believers in Ephesus.

Regardless whether or not the statement in Colossians 4:16 is a reference to the letter that we know as "Ephesians", it is important early evidence that at least some of the letters written by Paul were from the start intended to have a wider audience than the original addressees alone, i.e., that they contained a message for Christian believers elsewhere, too.

Christians believe that the Bible is <u>God's</u> word. We also believe that it is God's word <u>to us.</u>
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However, it is also clear that some statements and commands in the New Testament do address a local situation and cannot be applied literally to us. For instance, how can we fulfil the command of Romans 16:15 to "Greet Philologus", when we don't know anyone with that name? There are many such verses in the New Testament that refer to a specific occasion or person and not to us. The question is to discover which passages are of general application and which are merely illustrative of how the New Testament church behaved in certain specific situations.

Thus, it seems wise to evaluate on a case-by-case basis whether particular statements in the New Testament address a local situation only or have a wider application (for instance, in other equivalent situations today).

¹⁶ For instance Papyrus 46 (which is dated at between 175 and 225 AD), א ["aleph"], Codex Sinaiticus (c. 340 AD) and "B", Codex Vaticanus 1209 (c. 360 AD).

¹⁷ Born approximately 155 AD, died 240 AD. cf the following statement: "The Laodicean letter, mentioned in Colossians, is considered lost. However, following a suggestion by Tertullian ..., Harnack suggested that the canonical epistle to the Ephesians is this lost letter." From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laodicean_Church, accessed on 12.12.15. Harnack (1851-1930) was a prominent German theologian and church historian.

Things written by Paul that are hard to understand

2 Peter 3:15-16 says,

'Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.'

Selective quoting of Scripture

It certainly seems that 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 (and 1 Timothy 2:11-15) may come into that "difficult" category. And some church leaders are delighted to quote 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 or to quote 1 Timothy 2:11-12, which, according to the NIV (1984), states

'A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.'

However, the same leaders often fail to quote the rest of the passage, which says (again, according to the NIV, 1984)

'For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.' (1 Timothy 2:13-15)

No doubt they recognise that these are difficult verses (though there is a possible clear explanation even for these verses, and we will see it later in this article).

Let the Bible interpret itself

The basic principle of Biblical interpretation is to let the Bible explain itself. This means that we look at the overall message of the Scripture to help us understand the difficult passages.

Thus, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God —not by works, so that no-one can boast." (Eph 2:8-9) is a summary of a fundamental doctrine that is taught throughout the New Testament. Most of the letter to the Romans is dedicated to the theme of salvation by faith. So is most of the letter to the Galatians and of course most of the sermons in the book of Acts and the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. So when we come to James 2 (about the relationship between faith and works), we read it in the light of the general teaching of Scripture about salvation.

We need to do the same thing with what the Scripture teaches about the role of women. Unfortunately, since the fourth century the men who rose to positions of power in a church hierarchy that had virtually no Biblical basis both suppressed women who were in ministry and ignored the general teaching of the Bible concerning women. Unfortunately, even in the 21st century, there are many Christian groups that still do this, most notable among them in the west being the Roman Catholics and some evangelical groups.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35: women praying and prophesying in church – the context

So this is some of the background that we need to bear in mind when we come to 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. One of the strange things about these verses is that a few pages earlier Paul has been describing the dress code for women when they were praying and prophesying out loud in church meetings (1 Corinthians 11:5), which is why it would be remarkable if a short while later in the same letter he were to write that it was not permitted for women to speak in meetings. Is he contradicting himself?

Quotations in the New Testament

One of the problems that we have with New Testament Greek is that in the Greek there are no quotation marks. So when we see quotation marks in our Bible, it tells us that the translator or the publisher thinks that this is a quotation. Likewise, quotation marks may be missing when they should (according to English punctuation rules) be present.

Sometimes, the original text clearly tells us that we have a quotation. For instance:

- 'This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases." '(Matthew 8:17)
- 'What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." '(Acts 13:32-33)
- 'This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people." '(Acts 2:16-17)
- 'The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" '(Matthew 8:25)

On some other occasions it is not clear whether or not we have a quotation. For instance, in John chapter 3, we know (from the words) that one of the quotations of what Jesus said starts in verse 10:

' "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? " '

But we cannot be certain where this quotation ends. Is it at the end of verse 15, or of verse 16 or of one of the other verses up to and including verse 21? The quotation marks in your Bible will merely indicate the opinion of the translator, or of the publisher

Paul regularly quoted not only from Scripture but also from secular writers (e.g., Acts 17:28 quoting from the Greek poet Aratus, who lived about 300 B.C.), sometimes making sarcastic quotations (cf for instance Titus 1:12, quoting from Epimenides, who was born at Cnossus in Crete).

The church in Corinth: a church with many deep problems

The church in Corinth displayed many deep problems, and the apostle Paul addresses the first of these problems as soon as he has finished his introductory sentences – starting in chapter 1 verse 10.

In the letter he also uses irony and sarcasm as two tools, amongst others, to get through to the Corinthians. For instance in 1 Cor 4:8 he appears to paraphrase what they have apparently written or said to him:

'Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings — and that without us!' (Note the sarcasm here.)

The Apostle immediately reprimands them (and without using any punctuation marks!):

'How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!'

The rest of the same chapter reinforces the point, for instance with phrases such as

'I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.' (v. 14)

and

'Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.' (vv. 18-20)

In chapter 5, Paul indicates how shocked he is by the behaviour of some of the people in the Corinthian church. See, for instance, verses 1-2:

'It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: ... And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief?'

Paul's use of quotations throughout his letter to the Corinthians

In 1 Corinthians 7:1, Paul refers to the letter that he has received from the Christians in Corinth. We do not have a copy of that letter, but Paul repeatedly quotes from it and refers to it throughout his reply.

The most obvious translation of 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 is:

'Concerning what you wrote, that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman", on the contrary, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife and let each woman have her own husband.'¹⁸

Verse 2 clearly begins by contradicting the statement in verse 1. In the Greek, Paul uses the word **δέ** ["de"], which means "but" or "on the contrary".

Once we realise that verse 1 contains a quotation of a statement that Paul immediately rejects, this transforms our understanding of his attitude to marriage and to our understanding of his approach in this chapter. What is more, "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" can now be seen as not being an apostolic recommendation, but an erroneous idea that is rejected by the Apostle Paul.

As we consider other passages in this letter, we will repeatedly see the same scenario: the Apostle Paul quotes from statements made by the Corinthians in their letter – even though he does not preface each quotation with the words "concerning what you wrote". He then rejects the statement in the quotation and shows why it is wrong.

Paul quotes again from the letter that he had received from the Corinthians

We have another, similar, example at the beginning of 1 Corinthians 8. The translation (and the punctuation) should be as follows:

'Concerning the things dedicated to idols, we know "We all have knowledge". "Knowledge" makes people arrogant, but love, on the contrary, builds up.'

That is to say, the phrase "We all have knowledge" is what the Corinthians had written to Paul, and he immediately proceeds to explain why this is not an acceptable reaction for a Christian believer to make to a conflict between believers.

What aspects of the original text justify this translation? There are principally four:

¹⁸ Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι. ² διὰ δὲ τὰς πορνείας ἕκαστος τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἔχτω καὶ ἐκάστη τὸν ἴδιον ἄνδρα ἔχτω. (1 Cor 7:1-2, NA^{27/28})

Lest it be thought that here I am making an unsubstantiated claim, I give here the renderings of two respected recent translations into English:

'Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is well for a man not to touch a woman." ² But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.' (NRSV)

'Now for the matters you wrote about. You say, "It is a good thing for a man not to have intercourse with a woman." ² Rather, in the face of so much immorality, let each man have his own wife and each woman her own husband.' (Revised English Bible)

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- After the word “we know” comes the Greek word ὅτι [“hoti”], which is the normal word that is used to introduce a quotation (although in other contexts it can be simply equivalent to the word “that”).
- After the phrase “We all have knowledge” Paul again uses the Greek word δὲ [“de”], which indicates a contrast with the phrase preceding it. In this context, it indicates a rejection of what he has just said (in his quotation from the letter that he had received from them).
- When we look at the Greek of this verse, we also see another key word for understanding the meaning of the verse: φυσιοῖ [“fusioi”], which means “puffs up”, “inflates” or “makes arrogant”. Arrogance seemed to be one of the most typical characteristics of the Corinthian believers, and Paul repeats this word constantly in his reply to them, rebuking them for their arrogance and seeking to correct their misunderstandings and their attitudes.
- In 7:1 we saw that Paul started his answer to one of the points in the letter that he had received from the Corinthians with the words ‘Concerning what you wrote, ...’ The Greek here is Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε [“Peri de hōn egrápsate”]. The key word is Περὶ [“Peri”], which means “concerning, as regards, with reference to”. That reference must refer to something, and that “something” must have been a statement that they had made in their letter to him. Paul introduces a series of answers in this letter with the same word Περὶ [“Peri”], e.g., in 7:25, 8:4, 12:1 and 16:1. Verse 8:1 also starts with a Περὶ [“Peri”] – another clear indication that he is going to comment on something that they had written to him.¹⁹

What does all this mean?

Amongst the many divisions between the Christians in Corinth, they were also divided as to whether or not they should eat meat that had been dedicated to idols before being put on sale in the market. Those who had written to Paul said “We all have knowledge that idols represent inexistent gods. So, we can eat this meat.” Even though Paul knew that they were right about the inexistence of other gods, he wanted to remind them that their actions could cause problems for brothers and sisters who were weaker in the faith or for non-believers who did not have all this “knowledge”. He wanted to show them a better way, the way of love, and he introduced this theme in the very next phrase:

“Knowledge” makes people arrogant, but love, on the contrary, builds up.’

It is as though he were saying, ‘You are “Know-it-alls”. How arrogant you are!’ The rest of chapter 8 is dedicated to explaining this theme, and Paul returns to the theme of love again later in the letter (in chapter 13).

¹⁹ The Greek text of 8:1 states: Περὶ δὲ τῶν εἰδωλοθύτων, οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινῶσιν ἔχομεν. ἡ γινῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ.

Again, two highly-respected modern translations into English understand this verse in a similar way. The Revised English Bible has:

‘Now about meat consecrated to heathen deities. Of course “We all have knowledge,” as you say. “Knowledge” inflates a man, whereas love builds him up.’

The NRSV has:

‘Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.’

This is not the place to look at this particular topic in detail. However, we do see again that what Paul writes is a reply to a quotation from the letter that he had received from the Corinthians.

Once we recognise the phrases and even complete sentences in 1 Corinthians that are quotations from a letter written by them, it suddenly makes understanding this letter from Paul much easier.²⁰

A few more examples

In chapter 15, Paul quotes from something that was apparently being said by some of the people in Corinth as justification for their immoral behaviour:

"Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!" (v. 32, NLT)²¹

The Corinthians had apparently quoted this in a letter to Paul, and – in his most biting, sarcastic manner – he imitated and simultaneously ridiculed their writing style by answering one quotation with another, like them even quoting from an ungodly person (in this case, a Greek poet, believed to be Menander). The New Living Translation renders his response as follows:

'Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character." (v. 33)

To make sure that the Corinthians understood the force of what he was saying, as elsewhere in the letter he followed the quotation with a sharp reprimand:

'Think carefully about what is right, and stop sinning. For to your shame I say that some of you don't know God at all.' (v. 34)

So some of the Corinthians who were in the church were not only living sinful lives; they were not even Christians – yet they were telling the church – and even Paul! – how to behave!

"All things are lawful for me"

Another phrase repeatedly used by the Corinthians to justify their bad behaviour was "All things are lawful for me." Paul quotes it twice in this letter, rejecting it on both occasions:

' "All things are lawful for me" – but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me" – but I will not be dominated by anything.' (1 Corinthians 6:12-13, NRSV)

The Corinthians justified their over-eating (cf 1 Corinthians 11:21) by quoting what was apparently a popular saying at the time:

"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," (1 Corinthians 6:13, NRSV)

The Apostle Paul responded angrily:

'God will destroy both the one and the other.' (same verse)

²⁰ The Apostle Paul employs a similar tactic in his letter to the Romans, although in that letter he quotes not from the Romans but from Jews who criticised him. The result is that many sections of the letter to the Romans are like a dialogue, with questions (mostly based on quotations from those who criticised him) followed by the answers given by the Apostle. (See, for example, Romans 3:1-2, 3:3-4, 3:9, 4:9, 4:10, 6:1-2, 6:15-16, 7:7, 7:13, 9:30, 9:31-32. This is a far from complete list.)

²¹ Holy Bible, New Living Translation®, copyright © 1996, 2004 by Tyndale Charitable Trust.

This saying is also found in Isaiah 22:13, where it is introduced as a quotation of something said by ungodly people. This saying appears to have had considerable popularity in New Testament times, and the same idea (possibly the same phrase) is also paraphrased (and criticised) by Jesus in a story about a rich man who didn't think about God (Luke 12:19).

He then extended this reference to their excessive eating and drinking, and also applied it to the immoral sexual behaviour of the people of Corinth, continuing with a series of rebukes and teaching throughout the whole of the rest of the chapter.

Implications for the understanding of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35

Reading the context of these other sections of the letter helps us to appreciate the style that Paul is using in this letter, frequently quoting from things the Corinthians have said, sometimes with direct quotations (see, for instance, chapter 1 verse 12), sometimes rephrasing what they have said (as in chapter 4 verse 8). For these reasons and others, many interpreters of the Greek text of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 believe that what we have here is another quotation from something that people in Corinth were saying:

' "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." ' (1 Corinthians 14:33-35)

Paul then seems to refute this, rebuking them again for what they have said:

'Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command.' (1 Corinthians 14:36-37)

If he had agreed with the text of verses 33-35, he just would not have followed it with a rebuke, since these words simply do not make sense as a logical continuation of the previous three sentences. Verses 36 and 37 are clearly another reprimand to the Corinthians. With regard to what? The only obvious answer is: with regard to the three sentences that immediately precede the rebuke, the sentences which state that women were not allowed to speak in public.

As he frequently did, Paul is asserting his authority as an apostle and warning the Corinthians not to accept rules that others were trying to impose. See, in the same letter, chapter 9 and verses 1 and 2. Similar examples can be seen in Galatians, for instance, in chapter 1:6-12.

What "law"?

When the Corinthians said, "(Women) are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says", it is not clear to which law they were appealing. Was it the Law of Moses? Unfortunately for them, the Law of Moses does not say that anywhere. Or was it to Roman law, under which the Corinthians lived? Unfortunately for them, there was no such Roman law, either. So they didn't know their Old Testament very well (which would not be surprising, as most of them were not Jews). Nor did they know Roman law very well, if they thought that it was what supported their claim about keeping women silent.

Once we understand that Paul is quoting what they had been saying, his rebuke makes sense. It is as though he were answering them, "Who do you think you are, making up rules and saying who is allowed to speak in church and who isn't?"

We should also remember that Paul was well-known for his opposition to the imposing of the law on believers. Thus for him to have appealed to a law (and a non-existent one at that!) in order to impose restrictions on believers would have gone against the core of his teaching as evidenced in the New Testament. For example, Paul wrote elsewhere:

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'For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed²² ... through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.' (Romans 3:20-22)

He went on to say,

'For there is no distinction' (v 22).

In this context he was saying that there was no difference between Jews and Gentiles. But elsewhere (Gal 3:28) he was to say that there was no difference between men and women. He continued his condemnation of the law by writing:

²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith.²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.' (Romans 3:27-28 NRSV)

It is thus extremely implausible to believe that he could have sought to impose restrictions on the Corinthian believers by appealing to a law, whether religious or secular. The only possible understanding is that he must have been quoting from *them* appealing to a supposed law, and he immediately followed up this quotation by condemning them harshly for inventing new rules.

What is more, some in the Corinthian church had also been forbidding other people from speaking in church, and so Paul goes on to say just a few sentences later, "do not forbid speaking in tongues." (1 Corinthians 14:39)

However, perhaps the clearest pointer to what Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 14 comes a mere three chapters earlier in the letter, in 1 Corinthians 11 (and, of course, Paul did not divide his letters up into chapters, anyway; these divisions were first added over 1,000 years later).

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul gives instructions on culturally-sensitive clothing for women to wear when they are praying or prophesying in public – i.e., when they are speaking in a meeting of believers. For most Christians in the 21st century, the equivalent of such a meeting of believers is what we would call a "church service". Paul does not say that they should not pray or prophesy in the meeting, only, how they should dress on such occasions.²²

He goes on to speak of the equal status of men and women:

'In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.' (v. 11, NIV)

Paul then goes on to criticise the way the Corinthians run their meetings:

'In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.' (v. 17, NIV). He expands on this theme in chapter 14.

It is significant that between 1 Corinthians 11 (culturally-determined dress code) and 1 Corinthians 14, Paul has given major teaching on the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). He makes the point that the gifts are given to whomever the Spirit determines (v. 11). At no point are any gifts limited to men only.

Paul then gave major teaching on "the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27), again with no reference to there being some roles for men and different roles for women. Next, he wrote,

²² For a detailed study of other aspects of 1 Corinthians 11, I would recommend Philip B Payne's "Man and Woman, One in Christ", Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009 and Marg Mowczko's articles, here: <https://margmowczko.com/category/equality-and-gender-issues/1-corinthians-11-2-16/>

God's plan for women in the church

'in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.' (1 Corinthians 12:28)

– again with no indication that any of these roles are for men only.

All of these things make it very hard to believe that in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 it was Paul who was saying that women should not speak in church. Does it seem likely that he would contradict himself, especially within one and the same letter?

1 Corinthians 14:33-35 Summary

Thus, it seems that these verses

- contradict the immediate context of the verses that precede and follow them;
- contradict the wider context of Paul's teaching on women speaking in public earlier in the same letter;
- contradict his practice throughout his ministry of working with women who were active in the preaching and teaching of the gospel (see reference to Phoebe the deaconess, Junia the Apostle, Prisca (Priscilla) the teacher, all referred to elsewhere in this article).

CHAPTER 7

1 Timothy 2:11-15:

How to deal with false teaching in the church

The first letter to Timothy was written by Paul in the latter years of his ministry when Timothy was in Ephesus. A number of years earlier, when Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem from Greece, he stopped in Miletus, an ancient Greek city on the western coast of the country that we now call Turkey.²³ Acts 20:17 tells us that "From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church." (NIV) When they arrived, he said to them, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:29-30, NIV)

It is clear that by the time that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, the problems that he had previously warned the leaders of the Ephesian church about had started to show themselves. In chapter 1 of this letter, we see that the church in Ephesus had been troubled by false teaching, some of it by men (v 3), but other false teaching had come from a woman, who is not named. It is perhaps significant that Paul writes,

'I do not permit a woman to teach' (1 Timothy 2:12a), referring to "a woman", rather than "women" in general. Some interpreters say that he is referring to a specific woman, rather than to all women. There was definitely a problem in a different church (the one in Thyatira) with *one woman* who called herself a prophetess and by her false teaching led many believers astray (Revelation 2:20-25), and this may have been the same sort of situation.

In this letter, the Apostle Paul condemns some of the false teachings being manifested in Ephesus and he is extremely harsh concerning the people who promote these teachings: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:1-2, NIV) He accuses them of "meaningless talk" and says, "They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm." (1 Timothy 1:6-7, NIV) Later in the letter, he refers to these people as "conceited" teachers who "understand nothing" (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

In 1 Timothy, Paul refers to various false teachings:

- "myths and endless genealogies" (1 Timothy 1:4, NIV),
- "They forbid people to marry" (1 Timothy 4:3, NIV)
- the imposition of rules (probably Jewish rules) about what foods were permitted: "[they] order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:3b-5, NIV)

There were also problems concerning the care of widows (1 Timothy 5:3-15), and other matters, including "the love of money" (1 Timothy 6:5-10).

²³ cf <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miletus>, consulted on 15.7.17.

Paul's letter to Titus is considered to have a very close affinity with 1 Timothy, with which it shares similar phrases and expressions and similar subject matter²⁴. Yet in Titus 2:3, Paul says that older women *should* teach. It seems hardly likely that he would have contradicted himself in two letters apparently written at a similar time and on similar themes, so we must conclude that in 1 Timothy he cannot have been issuing a blanket ban on women teaching.

Bullying in the church

The second part of 1 Timothy 2:12 (verse "12b") is translated in the NIV as "I do not permit a woman to ... have authority over a man." However, there are difficulties in knowing the exact meaning of the Greek word that is translated in the NIV as "to have authority over", ἀὐθεντεῖν ("authentein"), as it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament and it also occurs nowhere in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) that was used by Jews at the time of Christ and by the first Christians.

The definitive reference work on Koiné Greek vocabulary, "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature" by Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich²⁵, consults the use of this word in secular Greek literature of the period and gives the definition "to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to".

Charles Van der Pool, the translator of the Apostolic Bible²⁶, understands the same meaning and translates the word as "to domineer". A more modern synonym for that would be "to bully".

Mowczko has reported on the results of an exhaustive study of the use and meaning of the word ἀὐθεντεῖν ("authentein") in classical and Biblical times²⁷, and concludes by quoting from Westfall²⁸:

"In the Greek corpus, the verb authenteō refers to a range of actions that are not restricted to murder or violence [the original meanings]. However, the people who are targets of these actions are harmed, forced against their will (compelled), or at least their self-interest is being overridden because the actions involve an imposition of the subject's will, ranging from dishonour to lethal force."

This does indeed sound very much like "domineering", if not worse. Mowczko then states: "I believe Westfall's statement accurately captures the essence of authenteō (and authentein.) Nevertheless, we can only speculate how this force or coercion was being used by a woman in Ephesus towards a man, probably her husband."

According to "The Exhaustive Concordance to the Greek New Testament"²⁹, the verb ἀὐθεντέω, of which ἀὐθεντεῖν is an infinitive, is related to the word ἀυθάδης, which BDAG defines as "self-willed, stubborn, arrogant".³⁰ (This word occurs in Titus 1:7 and 2 Peter 2:10.)

²⁴ cf http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_Titus consulted on 10.2.14.

²⁵ "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition", Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000 (known as "BDAG" for short)

²⁶ "The Apostolic Bible – Polyglot", Newport, Oregon: The Apostolic Press, 1996

²⁷ Here: http://margmowczko.com/authentein-1-timothy2_12/ Consulted on 5th April 2018.

²⁸ Cynthia Long Westfall, "Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ", Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016, p. 292.

²⁹ John R Kohlenberger III, Edward W Goodrick and James A Swanson, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995

Arrogance and bullying should not characterise the behaviour of the followers of Jesus.

When James and John asked to be given the top positions in the kingdom of God, Jesus reprimanded them. Then

‘Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. "' (Mark 10:42-44)

Elsewhere, Jesus said,

‘for you have only one Master and you are all brothers and sisters.’ (Matthew 23:8)

In John 13 we read:

‘When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. "' (John 13:12-17)

So there was no place in the New Testament church for anyone to be arrogant or to bully anyone else – whether it was men domineering women or women domineering men. This is why the Apostle Paul had previously written to the very same church in Ephesus precisely about the relationships between men and women, saying

‘Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.’ (Ephesians 5:21)

In spite of this, clearly, in Ephesus at the time when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy there was a woman who was trying to bully a man or men, and Paul would not have it – any more than he would have men bullying women.

One occasionally sees church leaders who bully other members of the “leadership team” or who bully individuals in their congregation or even the whole congregation. Such things should not happen, whether it is men bullying women, women bullying men or any one group or individual bullying any other. This is the clear message of 1 Timothy 2:12b. Just a little further on in the same letter (in 1 Timothy 3:3) the Apostle continues the same theme by describing, by contrast, the qualities that should characterise leaders, saying that the leader must be “not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome.” (NIV) What a contrast with the domineering woman in 1 Timothy 2:12b!

1 Timothy 2:11 and 12c: “silence”

The Authorised (“King James”) Version translates 1 Timothy 2:11a as:

‘Let the woman learn in silence’

There are two problems with the last two words of this translation:

1. The normal Koiné Greek word for “silence” does not appear in this verse;
2. The word that is here translated as “silence” does not have this meaning.

³⁰ Kohlenberger et. al. indicate that ἀυθάδης (“authadēs”) is derived from ἀυθεντειν + ἡδονή (“authentein” + “hēdonē”), which is defined in BDAG as “pleasure”, from which we would conclude that ἀυθάδης (“authadēs”) could be translated as “self-pleasing”. The NRSV translates it in 2 Peter 2:10 as “wilful”.

We will look separately at each of these points.

1. The normal Koiné Greek word for “silence” does not appear in this verse

The normal Greek word for to be or to become silent is σιωπάω (“siōpaō”), which is used frequently in the New Testament and is appropriately translated, “to keep silent, to say nothing, to stop speaking”.³¹ A few examples from the New Testament will illustrate this.

In Matthew 26:63 we read

ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἐσιώπα (“ho de Yēsus esiōpa”).

The NIV translates this as

‘But Jesus remained silent.’

The NRSV gives the translation,

‘But Jesus was silent.’

In Mark 3:4 we read

καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· ἔξεστιν τοῖς σάββασιν ἀγαθὸν ποιῆσαι ἢ κακοποιῆσαι, ψυχὴν σῶσαι ἢ ἀποκτεῖναι; οἱ δὲ ἐσιώπων. (“kai legei autois, Exestin tois sábasin agathón poiēsai ē kakopoiēsai, psuchēn sōsai ē apokteinaí? hoi de esiōpōn.”)

The NIV translates this as,

‘Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.’

The NRSV translates it as

‘Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent.’

In Luke 19:40 we see Jesus’ words to the Jewish leaders:

καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν· λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν οὗτοι σιωπήσουσιν, οἱ λίθοι κράξουσιν. (“kai apokritheis eipen, lego humin, ean houtoi siōpēsousin, hoi lithoi kraxousin”)

The NIV translates this as

“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

The NRSV gives,

‘He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”’

Luke 1:20 gives us Gabriel’s rebuke to Zacharias for not believing his message:

‘καὶ ἰδοὺ ἔση σιωπῶν καὶ μὴ δυνάμενος λαλῆσαι ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας γένηται ταῦτα’ (“kai idou esē siōpōn kai mē dunámenos lalēsai achri hēs hēméras genētai tauta”)

The NIV renders this as:

‘“now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens”’

The NRSV translates this as:

“you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”’

Many other examples could be given. They confirm that the normal Koiné Greek word for to be or to become silent is σιωπάω (“siōpaō”)³². Yet this word is not used in 1 Timothy 2:11 and 12c.

³¹ Gingrich defines σιωπάω as: *be silent*—1. *keep silent, say nothing* Mt 26:63; Mk 3:4; 9:34; 14:61; Ac 18:9.—2. *stop speaking, be or become quiet* Mt 20:31; Mk 10:48; Lk 18:39 v.l.; 19:40. *Lose the ability to speak* Lk 1:20.—Symbolically Mk 4:39.* [*aposiopesis*, ἀπό σιωπᾶν, breaking off in the expression of a thought].

³² Another Greek word that means to be or become silent is σιγάω [“sigāō”]. It occurs rarely in the New Testament (just ten times), and is not used in any of these verses in 1 Timothy 2.

2. The word in 1 Timothy 2:11 and 12c that some translations render as “silence” does not mean that

The phrase that was translated in the King James Authorised Version in 1611 as “in silence” is ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ (“en hēsuchia”). But ἡσυχία (“hēsuchia”) is defined in Gingrich’s Greek Lexicon as “quietness, rest. Opposite of causing a disturbance; orderliness”. Thus, N T Wright, in his translation, “The New Testament for Everyone”³³, translates this sentence as follows:

‘They must study undisturbed’

In a society where women were frequently considered inferior and were often bullied by men, perhaps Paul was not restricting women but – on the contrary – warning men not to prevent women from studying God’s word.

The same phrase ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ (“en hēsuchia”) is repeated at the end of verse 12 (verse “12c”). The Authorised (“King James”) Version again renders this as “in silence”. N T Wright translates it as

‘they should be left undisturbed’.

It is interesting that the Apostle had already used the word ἡσυχία (“hēsuchia”) earlier in the very same chapter, but on that occasion he applied it to all believers, not just to women:

‘I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone, – ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.’ (1Timothy 2:1-2 NIV)

The words here translated as “quiet lives” are ἡσύχιον βίον (“hēsuchion bion”). The clear meaning is that all believers should be able to live lives that are not disturbed or disrupted by the authorities or by the society in which they find themselves. It does not say that they should conduct their lives in silence.

The Apostle Paul also used the same word in other letters. In 1 Thessalonians he used the verb that is derived from same word in a phrase that the NIV translates as:

‘Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.’ (1 Thessalonians 4:11 NIV)

The word in this verse that the NIV translates “to lead a quiet life” is ἡσυχάζειν (“hēsuchazein”). The Spanish Nueva Versión Internacional (Spanish NVI) renders this with a phrase that means

‘seek to live in peace with everyone.’

Eugene Peterson’s “THE MESSAGE” simply renders the original as

‘Stay calm.’

In 2 Thessalonians Paul again used the same word when reprimanding those who were “idle”:

‘Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.’ (2 Thessalonians 3:12, NIV)

The phrase that the NIV translates “to settle down and earn” is μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι (“meta hēsuchias ergazomenoi”). Perhaps the NRSV is a little nearer to the original of this phrase with its

‘to do their work quietly and to earn’.

³³ London, SPCK, 2011. Dr Wright is a Bishop of the Church of England and “one of the world’s foremost New Testament theologians”, according to the dust jacket of this book. Even though we might expect hyperbole from his publisher, many academics world-wide would agree with this assessment. At the time of writing this article, he is Research Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the University of St Andrews.

In any case, it is clear that the instruction to live in the way described by the words “hēsuchazein” (in 1 Thessalonians) and “hēsuchia” (in 2Thessalonians) apply to men as well as to women. Does it say that they are to be silent? No translation that I have seen understands “hēsuchazein” and “hēsuchia” to mean that in these contexts.

Is it likely that the Apostle Paul would have used the word “hēsuchia” and the verb derived from it with one meaning in his letters to the Thessalonians, and then the same word, but with a totally different meaning, in his letter to Timothy?

Within his first letter to Timothy, is it likely that the Apostle Paul would have used the word “hēsuchia” three times within a few minutes of each other (in verse 2 and then in verses 11 and 12) but with totally different meanings?

In 1 Timothy 2:2 it means “undisturbed”. Is it credible to claim that it suddenly takes on the meaning “be silent” a few verses later? Moreover, when we remember that Greek has a totally different word for “silent” or “silence”, this seems highly improbable. We can thus see that N T Wright’s translation is fully justified by the meaning of the word.

It does appear that in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 many translators have let themselves be influenced by previous mistranslations and, consciously or not, by their own, personal attitudes to women.

When we understand the meaning of this Greek word, we see that Paul is not preventing women from being equal but in fact supporting their equal right to study just as men did, without being disturbed or bullied.

1 Timothy 2:15: “childbearing”

This difficult and often-misunderstood section of 1 Timothy 2 is crowned with another puzzling verse. The NIV translates it as:

‘women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.’

Again, we are not well-served by some translations. The Greek does not say “women will be saved ...” In fact, the word “women” or “woman” is nowhere in the verse. The verb would best be translated “(she) will be saved ...” (or see below other possible translations of the Greek word here rendered “saved”). In this case, the implicit “she” would appear to be referring back to Eve in the previous verse (though even the word “she” is not in the Greek text).

Some interpreters see in this verse a reference to the fulfilment of the promise in Genesis 3:15, where God says to Satan,

‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel’

If this is the case, the “he” in this verse is understood as referring to Christ. Thus, in his paraphrase, Eugene H Peterson writes

‘On the other hand, her childbearing brought about salvation, reversing Eve. But this salvation only comes to those who continue in faith, love, and holiness, gathering it all into maturity.’ (THE MESSAGE)

This is one interpretation of one of those “difficult passages written by Paul”, but it may actually convey the intended meaning.

For another understanding of this passage, I refer to N T Wright, in his translation, "The New Testament for Everyone", which renders 1 Tim 2:15 as follows:

'She will, however, be kept safe through the process of childbirth, if she continues in faith, love and holiness with prudence.'

Let us look at two details of the translation of this verse.

1. The Greek words δια τῆς τεκνογονίας ("dia tēs teknogonias"), which are translated as "through childbearing" in the NIV, may reasonably be translated "through the process of childbirth;"
2. and σωθήσεται, ("sōthēsetai") which is translated "will be saved" in the NIV, is from the Greek verb σώζω ("sōzō"), which is defined in the standard reference work of New Testament Greek, Bauer, as
"1 to preserve or rescue from natural dangers and afflictions, save, keep from harm ...
2 to save or preserve from transcendent danger or destruction".

It is thus clear that its original and basic meaning is not *spiritual* salvation in the standard evangelical understanding of the word, but can mean *physical* rescuing from danger. Thus, N T Wright's rendering "She will ... be kept safe" can be seen to be a justifiable translation.³⁴

This is a lot more straightforward than Peterson's paraphrase, and may indeed be the original meaning of this verse.

For a different interpretation of this verse, I refer to two articles by Mowczko, one of them already quoted from above.

In her article "Chastity, Salvation, and 1 Timothy 2:15"³⁵, she states,

"There are several indications in First Timothy that the heresy being addressed in the letter was an early or incipient form of Gnosticism. One of these indicators is 1 Timothy 4:3 where Paul states that some in the church at Ephesus were forbidding marriage. This heretical teaching is behind Paul's advice that younger widows remarry (1 Tim. 5:11-15). I also believe that Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:12-14 addressed Gnostic-like heresies that included false ideas about Adam and Eve. Furthermore, it is likely that Gnostic-like beliefs, especially sexual renunciation, are squarely behind Paul's corrective teaching on salvation in 1 Timothy 2:15."

In her article "The Meaning Of Authentein In 1 Timothy 2:12"³⁶, Mowczko states,

"Taking 1 Timothy 2:15 into consideration, I suspect that a woman in the Ephesian church may have been withholding sex from her husband, thinking it was an expression of piety. There is evidence that celibacy, even within marriage, was considered a virtue in the apostolic church, as well as later. Moreover, some early Christians connected celibacy with salvation (cf. The Acts of Paul and Thecla³⁷). Paul corrects this faulty understanding and connects having children, an expected outcome of sex, with salvation."

³⁴ Some have suggested that, in concrete terms, the true meaning of this is that when a woman has given birth, she forgets the birth pains when the child was born, which some women state to be the case.

³⁵ <http://margmowczko.com/chastity-salvation-1-timothy-215/> Accessed on 4th April 2018

³⁶ http://margmowczko.com/authentein-1-timothy2_12/ Accessed on 5th April 2018

³⁷ According to Wikipedia, "The Acts of Paul and Thecla (Acta Pauli et Theclae) is an apocryphal story ... of Paul the apostle's influence on a young virgin named Thecla. It is one of the writings of the New Testament apocrypha." See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_Paul_and_Thecla Accessed on 6th April 2018

God's plan for women in the church

In my opinion, we first see the real meaning of 1 Timothy 2:15 when we combine Mowczko's insights with an understanding of the range of meanings of the Greek verb σώζω ("sōzō"), explained above.

It appears that the dangers to the mother during childbirth may have been used as another reason given by these teachers who were forbidding sexual activity, even between a husband and wife, and so Paul responds that the mother (in this case, it is singular, referring to one specific woman) will be kept safe physically (not spiritually "saved") during childbirth. It is possible that he is here even delivering a specific "word of knowledge" that he has received from the Lord (1 Corinthians 12:8), or a prophecy that he has received for this particular woman (1 Corinthians 12:10).

The details of the incidents in Ephesus to which Paul refers in 1 Timothy 2:15 are not fully clear to us, and Mowczko's interpretation and the understandings of Peterson and N T Wright all make important contributions to our understanding of this verse and of its context in this letter.

CHAPTER 8 "Men are to keep silent in the churches"

Those who enthusiastically make use of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in order to deny all women any right to ministry or speaking in church conveniently ignore those New Testament passages that talk of men who are to keep silent in churches. In 1 Timothy 1:3 we read

'command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.' (NIV)

In Titus 1:10-11 we read,

'For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach.'

So here the New Testament says that men in two different churches (Ephesus, where Timothy was located when Paul's letter was written to him, and in Crete, where Titus was located) were to keep silent. Why? Because they were teaching false doctrine. So it is clear that these verses apply to specific men in specific churches – not to all men in general.

Likewise, there are many warnings about "false prophets" and "false teachers" in the New Testament, starting with statements by Christ Himself (cf. Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24:24, Mark 13:22, 2 Peter 2:1, 1 John 4:1, etc.). The existence of such men (and the words used are in the masculine) do not imply that other men are not to teach.

CONCLUSION

One rule for all

If we applied to 1 Timothy 1:3 and Titus 1:10-11 the same rule that domineering men have applied to 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and to 1 Timothy 2:11-15 – i.e., claim they apply to *all* men everywhere, then no-one at all would be allowed to speak in churches, to teach or to preach the gospel – and Christianity would not have outlived the first generation of believers!

It is clear that this was not the intention of the writers and nor was it understood in that way by the people who first read these letters.

The same applies to the status and role of women in the church. In the New Testament there is no blanket ban on men speaking in church, preaching the gospel or teaching. And nor is there a blanket ban on women speaking in church, preaching the gospel and teaching.

In the beginning, God created both men and women in His image. Although Hebrew and pagan society in Old Testament times was dominated by the power of men, prophets proclaimed (e.g., in Joel 2) a day when women would be treated as equal to men, and this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Centuries of oppression, prejudice and mistranslation of the Bible have often hidden this from our eyes. Thankfully, in recent years Christians have begun to see the truth of God's word on this important matter. We must pray that God will forgive us for our past prejudice and help us to implement His plan for humanity without blocking the work of the Holy Spirit for half of all believers.

Consequences for the church and for believers

It is thus absolutely clear from the example of the New Testament church and the teaching of the New Testament itself that both men and women may equally speak and teach in gatherings of believers and in the preaching of the gospel, regardless of their gender or the gender of those hearing them.

After reading this paper, one lady wrote to me as follows:

I believe that in general we women do not know what we have in our hands and all the value that Christ gives us, and this is because of centuries of oppression and being devalued. We were considered as objects and machines for making children, so that in order to remove the prejudices that have passed from generation to generation there needs to be a deep working of the Holy Spirit.

This is part of the freedom that Christ gives – freeing women from the exclusion that they have experienced from a large part of God's work in many cultures during many centuries, an exclusion that continues right up to the present day – including in the Christian church, in many cases!

Prejudices have indeed become ingrained in most of us, as regards the roles that we consider appropriate for men only and those that we consider appropriate for women only, and this affects our attitudes and reactions.

Thus, when we see in church a woman speaker who creates an impression that is not glorifying to God, it sometimes reinforces our prejudices against all women speakers and we may say that this is because she is a woman, and that therefore no woman should speak in

church. But when the same inappropriate behaviour is demonstrated by a man speaker, we may disregard it or at best not say that it is because he is a man, and that therefore *no man* should speak in church. And so women are judged by one criterion and men by another: in the case of a woman speaker, we *generalise* our conclusions and apply them to *all women* – something that we never do with men.

Even-handed treatment by Christ

I have heard a (male!) preacher justify prohibiting women from speaking in church by referring to the false teacher in Thyatira, a woman who is called “Jezebel” – after the Old Testament queen who persecuted the prophets and promoted worship of false gods in Israel (Revelation 2:20, 1 Kings 18-21, 2 Kings 9). However, that preacher did not point out that that in the previous letter in *the very same chapter of the Bible* (Revelation chapter 2), the letter to the church in Pergamum, Christ likens the false teachers in that church (*several* people, apparently all men) to Balaam (Revelation 2:14, Numbers 22-24, 31:1-8, Joshua 13:22), the Old Testament prophet who “enticed Israel to sin”.

Thus the condemnation of false teachers by Christ was not based on the *gender* of the people in question but on *the content of what they taught and did*. Having seen in the gospels Christ's even-handed treatment of men and women, it should not surprise us to see that here he first addresses a church where *several men* were guilty of false teaching and *then* he refers to a church where *a woman* (only *one!*) was giving false teaching.

Should all Christians preach and teach in church?

But stopping our opposition to women preaching and teaching in church does not mean that *anyone* and *everyone* **should** speak in public. There *are* some requirements for those who speak in public in the Lord's name. As we have seen above, the Bible clearly states that *some men* (as well as some women) *should not speak, preach or teach* in church. What are the requirements? To seek to define here the requirements for public speaking and teaching in Christian work would be beyond the scope of this paper, but some key, basic principles can be mentioned.

1. Speaking in God's name depends on gifts from God

The Bible teaches that it is “*God* [who] has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28, NIV 1984). The same passage goes on to say, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” (1 Corinthians 12:29, NIV 1984). The context makes it clear that the answer to all these questions is “No”. God has given to *some* people one or other of these gifts. Thus, he has *not given* these gifts to some others. However, we do sometimes see people teaching and preaching in church services who very clearly lack the knowledge, the skills, the divine gifting and the grace to do these things.

2. Those involved in public ministry should give glory to God

The purpose of every ministry is to *serve God*, yet sometimes one observes speakers whose behaviour seems to be designed to boost their own ego, to glorify *them* instead of glorifying *God* (see 1 Corinthians 10:31), so that we hear words and see body language that are not in agreement with the spiritual words that are spoken. When we see such people in the pulpit, with their studied postures and inflated egos, claiming that they know everything, that causes a feeling of rejection.

3. Those involved in public ministry should be sensitive to the requirements of the culture in which they live and minister

The world's standards of behaviour don't match the divine model of how we should behave as human beings – whether we are men or women. For this reason, all of us are called as believers not to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2). This is particularly important for any man or woman who wishes to serve the Lord. Scripture also warns us that we should not cause others to “stumble” (1 Corinthians 10:32).

Thus, the Apostle Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 11 that there are culturally-dependent dress conventions that must be observed. In fact, this extends to other aspects of the speaker's appearance, and Paul says that in Corinth the men should not have long hair! (1 Corinthians 11:14) Peter makes comments about suitable hair styles and clothing for women (1 Peter 3:3).

Speakers – whether men or women – should help those who hear them and see them to focus on God, not on the speaker.

4. Those involved in public ministry should demonstrate an exemplary life

Timothy was commanded to teach (1 Timothy 4:11), but in the very next verse he was also commanded to

'set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.' (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV 1984)

Titus is commissioned in the following way:

'You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. ⁷ In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness ⁸ and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.' (Titus 2:1, 7-8, NIV 1984)

5. Those involved in public ministry should show evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit

The Bible says that all believers should demonstrate the results of the Holy Spirit's work in their lives, by their behaviour, by the way that they dress, and by their attitudes. In Galatians 5:22-23, we read:

'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control.' (NIV 1984)

Other Bible verses give other requirements for leaders. (See, for instance, 1 Timothy 3:1-12, Titus 2:7b-8.)

6. Warning: Just quoting from the Bible is no indication that a speaker has a commission to preach driven by the Holy Spirit

The New Testament warns about false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13), false doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3, 6:3), false prophets and false teachers (2 Peter 2:1). It instructs the readers to “test everything” (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and says, ‘do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.’ (1 John 4:1, NIV)

It is a sad fact that in many countries of the world, a few minutes spent viewing a selection of religious TV channels will reveal men (and sometimes women) whose teaching is unbiblical, whose dress style is not honouring to God and whose behaviour

God's plan for women in the church

does not give glory to God. The question is not one of gender; it is a far more fundamental matter of obedience to God.

Discerning God's gifts

As believers, we must discern who has been sent from God to teach and preach, and who has not. But that is not determined by their gender.

Likewise, we must all discern the gifts that God has given (and has not given!) to each of us. It is clear to me that God has not given me the gift of a singing voice – and it must be even clearer to anyone standing nearby who hears me sing in church!

But let us not try to limit God and determine in advance which gifts we will let Him give to each believer! Sometimes, our culture and expectations – and even the unbiblical doctrines that we have ourselves invented or inherited! – have imposed on some men the burden of leading, preaching or teaching, when they did not have these gifts or this calling.

Likewise, when choosing people as Sunday School teachers or for other activities with children, we have sometimes assumed that we should exclude men, even though in many countries there are now men trained as primary school teachers, kindergarten leaders and child counsellors. (We naturally expect each church in whatever country to have suitable child-protection procedures in place, so that unsuitable people – whether men or women – are not involved in working with vulnerable people, whether children or adults.)

So we need to discern for all believers – whether men or women – what God's gifts to them are and what His calling to them is, without excluding anyone from God's plans for their life.