

Correcting Caricatures: The Biblical Teaching on Women

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If we all approach the text of Scripture, each having his or her own framework of understanding (even when we share a view of the Bible that it is inerrant and true in all it affirms and teaches), is there any hope that we can ever reach a “correct” or “objectively valid” interpretation,¹ especially on passages that are so sensitive as those that deal with the place and privilege of women in the body of Christ today? Surely, no one particular set of presuppositions is to be favored in and of itself over any other set of presuppositions as the proper preparation for understanding a text. And no one starts with a *tabula rasa*, a blank mind. So does this mean we are hopelessly deadlocked with no possibility for a resolution?

But evangelicals do argue, nevertheless, that despite the acknowledgement that we all begin with a certain number of presuppositions, this does not demolish the possibility of our reaching a correct interpretation. Our pre-understandings are changeable and, therefore, they can and should be altered by the text of Scripture. Just as one must not involve one’s self in a hopeless contradiction by declaring that “absolutely, there are no absolutes,” in the same manner, to declare, “Objectively, there are no objective or correct meanings possible for interpreting a passage of Scripture,” is to decry exactly what is being affirmed. The way out of this quandary of both the relativist or the perspectivalist conundrum is to identify the presence of those aspects of thought that are self-evident first principles of thought that transcend every perspective, and act the same way for all people, all times, and all cultures.² This is not to say that a correct, or an objective, interpretation is always reached in every attempted interpretation. But, for those who accept the God who has created all mortals and given us the gift of language when he gave us the “image of God,” it is not a stretch to say that a “correct” and “objective understanding” is possible for subsequent readers of the earlier revelation of God. The God who made the world is the same God who made our minds, thus, a direct connection between my mind and the world is possible. To deny objectivity would be self-defeating, for it would again reduce itself to a violation of the law of non-contradiction. Accordingly, there is real hope for realizing an objective meaning and deciding between various truth claims and even between differing perspectives and different worldviews.³

All of this must serve as a preface to our remarks, for some have grown so weary of this discussion that they have just given

up and decided that nothing more can be said that will move any others from their entrenched positions. But an evangelical must not either surrender to the status quo of a multiplicity of competing interpretations or reject simply out of hand honest discussion of the key points of Scripture on these matters. All correct interpretations will stand both the test of challenges as well as the test of time. So, let me review the scriptural teaching on the place and gifts God has given to women. Scripture, after all, is our only final arbiter on all such matters.⁴

1. Genesis 2:18. Woman as possessing “power” or “strength” corresponding to the man.

Adam was regarded by his Creator as incomplete and deficient as he lived at first without the benefit of a proper counterpart. He was without community. God said: “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). So, as Ecclesiastes 4:9–11 expressed it, “Two are better than one....” Accordingly, in order to end man’s loneliness, God formed “for Adam [a] suitable helper” (Gen. 2:18)—or at least that is the way most have rendered the Hebrew word *‘ezer*.

Now, there is nothing pejorative about the translation “helper,” for the same word is used for God, but it is also variously translated as “strength,” as in “He is your shield and *helper* [= *strength*] (*‘ezer*)” in Deuteronomy 33:29; 33:26.

But R. David Freedman⁵ has argued quite convincingly that our Hebrew word *‘ezer* is a combination of two older Hebrew/Canaanite roots, one, *‘z-r*, meaning “to rescue, to save,” and the other, *g-z-r*, meaning “to be strong,” to use their verbal forms for the moment. The difference between the two is in the first Hebrew letter that is today somewhat silent in pronunciation and coming where the letter “o” comes in the English alphabet. The initial *ṣ*, or *ḡhayyin*, fell together in the Hebrew alphabet and was represented by the one sign *ṣ*, or *‘ayyin*. However, we do know that both letters were originally pronounced separately, for their sounds are preserved in the “g” sound still preserved in English today, as in such place names as Gaza or Gomorrah, both of which are now spelled in Hebrew with the same letter, *‘ayyin*. Ugaritic, a Canaanite tongue, which shares about sixty percent of its vocabulary with Hebrew, did distinguish between the *ḡhayyin* and the *‘ayyin* in its alphabet of thirty letters, as it represents the language around 1500 to 1200 B.C. It seems that somewhere around 1500 B.C. the two phonemes merged into one grapheme



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and, thus, the two roots merged into one. Moreover, the Hebrew word *‘ezer* appears twenty-one times in the Old Testament, often in parallelism with words denoting “strength” or “power,” thereby suggesting that two individual words were still being represented under the common single spelling. Therefore, I believe it is best to translate Genesis 2:18 as “I will make [the woman] a power [or strength] corresponding to the man.”

The proof for this rendering seems to be indicated in 1 Corinthians 11:10, where Paul argued, “For this reason, a woman ought to have power [or authority] on her head.” Everywhere Paul uses the Greek word *exousia* in 1 Corinthians it means “authority,” or “power.” Moreover, never is it used in the passive sense, but only in the active sense (1 Cor. 7:37; 8:9; 9:4, 5). But in one of the weirdest twists in translation history, this one word was rendered “a veil, a symbol of authority” on her head!! But, as Katharine C. Bushnell showed in the early years of the twentieth century, the substitution of “veil” for “power” goes all the way back to the Gnostic Alexandrian teacher known as Valentinus, who founded a sect named after himself sometime between A.D. 140 and his death on Cyprus in A.D. 160. His native tongue was Coptic, and, in Coptic, the word for “power” and the word for “veil” bore a close resemblance in sound and in print: *ouer-shishi*, meaning “power, authority,” and *ouershoun*, meaning “veil.” Both Clement and Origen also came from Alexandria, Egypt, so they too made the same mistake, possibly off the same Coptic type of manuscripts or influence of Valentinus in that city of Alexandria.

This debacle continues right down to our own day. For example, the NIV insists on saying “the woman ought to have a *sign of authority* on her head” (emphasis ours). Even though the unwarranted word “veil” has dropped out, the expanded “sign of authority” for *exousia* remains!

But let the word stand as it should and the question arises: Where did Paul find that “power” or “authority” was placed on the head of a woman? In Genesis 2:18—that is where!!

So, rather than saying a woman is to be a “helper corresponding to the man,” instead, the text teaches that the woman has been given “authority,” “strength,” or “power” that is “equal to [man’s].” The full Hebrew expression is *‘ezer kənegdô*. If later Hebrew is of any help here, this second Hebrew word, often translated as “corresponding to him,” is used in later Hebrew as meaning “equal to him.” Surely, that would assuage Adam’s loneliness.

That line of reasoning would also be borne out in Genesis 2:23, where Adam says to Eve, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” This idiomatic expression points to family propinquity, one’s own close relative, or, in effect, “my equal.”

Finally, woman was never meant to be a “helpmate,” no matter which force is given to this word *‘ezer*. The Old English “meet” or “suitable to” slipped to a new English word, “mate.” But what God had intended was to make her a “power” or “strength,” who would in every respect “correspond to” the man, that is, to be “his equal.”

2. Genesis 3:16 is not a command for man to rule over the woman, but it is a curse: men [unfortunately] will rule over women.

This text, contrary to popular opinion and repeated incorrect appeal for support to 1 Corinthians 14:34 (“[Women] are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the *law says*”), does not demand that men are to take charge of their women and “rule over them.” Rather than viewing this as a normative and prescriptive text found in the Mosaic Law and revealed by God, it is in a *curse* passage that predicts what will happen when women “turn” toward their husbands instead of turning to God. In effect, if God were explaining this in today’s plain speech, God might have phrased it thus: “The truth is that, as a result of the fall, do not be surprised, my good lady, if that guy just plain lords it over you.” The statement does not have the slightest hint of a command or a mandate for men to assume that they are in charge, nor is it a prescriptive command from God by any means. The Hebrew grammar may not be rendered as “[the man] *must* [or *shall*] rule over you.” To demand such a rendering here would be to invite a similar move in verse 18 of this chapter, where “[the ground] *must* produce thorns and thistles for you.” Farmers (should this be the accurate way to render this text) would need to stop using weed killer or pulling out such thorns and thistles, for God otherwise demands that they be left in place in the farm, if this too was meant to be normative in God’s order of things. But of course that is nonsense—and so is the same logic for verse 16.

Some, of course, will object by saying that Genesis 4:7 has the same construction, where “sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you *must master it*” (NIV, emphasis ours). Both the word for “turning,” incorrectly translated, as we will see later on here, as “desire,” and the verb “to rule,” or “to master,” are found here as in Genesis 3:16. Accordingly, it is alleged that the rendering of Genesis 4:7 seems to validate the rendering of Genesis 3:16.

However, a more preferable rendering of the verb in Genesis 4:7 is to understand that a question is being asked here. The Hebrew particle signaling a question is absent in about one-half of the Hebrew questions in the Bible, as it is here. Therefore, we would render the last part of Genesis 4:7, “But you, will you rule (or “master”) over it?” (i.e., the sin that is lingering at the door of Cain). That would allow for the verb to be rendered in its normal way, “*will rule*,” or “*will master*,” rather than “*must rule*.”

So, the traditional move to see the “law” referred to in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 as the Mosaic Torah is totally without any basis, for the Genesis passage would need to command and mandate husbands to rule over their wives, which it distinctly does not! As we will see later on, there are plenty of places in the Jewish law of the Talmud and Mishnah where just such a command does occur, but one is pressed to embarrassment to find any such hint, much less an order to do such, in the Law of Moses or, for that matter, anywhere else in the Old Testament.

3. Genesis 3:16. Women did not acquire sexual desires or develop “lust” for men as a result of the Fall!

This translation story has to be one of the oddest stories ever told. It is a travesty of errors, in which one man in particular, an Italian Dominican monk named Pagnino, published his version at Lyons in A.D. 1528 with the meaning “lust,” and thus occasioned a parade of mimics who have continued to follow his lead to this very day!

The Hebrew word *tēshûqâ* only appears three times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 3:16, 4:7; Song of Sol. 7:10). The third century B.C. Greek Septuagint⁶ rendered the two Genesis passages as *apostrophe* (meaning “turning away”) and the Song of Solomon passage as *epistrophe* (meaning “turning to”). The Samaritan Pentateuch also rendered the two Genesis passages as “turning,” as did the Old Latin, the Coptic (Bhairic), and the Ethiopic version of A.D. 500.

Jerome’s Latin Vulgate, produced around A.D. 382, under the influence of Jewish rabbis, rendered Genesis 3:16, “Thou shalt be under the power of a husband, and he will rule over thee.” And so the history of an error began.

The result was that Pagnino’s version appeared in every English version. But the problem with Pagnino, as with those earlier deviations already representatively noted here, was this: they tended to depend on the rabbis for their sense of this infrequently used word in the Bible instead of depending on the Ancient Versions of the Scripture such as the Greek Septuagint, the Syriac Peshitto, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Old Latin, the Coptic Versions, and the Ethiopic. But where the rabbis or the Babylonian Talmud were followed, such as by Aquila’s Greek, Symmachus’s Greek, Theodotion’s Greek, or the Latin Vulgate, preference was given to senses like “lust,” “impulse,” “alliance,” or the like. Bushnell concludes this enormous piece of philological and translation detective work by saying, “Of the 28 known renderings of *teshuqa*,...the word is rendered ‘turning’ 21 times. In the 7 remaining renderings, only 2 seem to agree; all the others disagree.”⁷ Even the early Church Fathers give evidence of knowing no other rendering for this Hebrew word than “turning.”

Therefore, let us be done once and for all with any idea that women, since the Fall, have lusted after men and that is why men must control them as best as they can. This must be a male fantasy at best, or a downright imposition of one’s own imagination on the text, because of certain interpretive schools of thought that grew up around a word that had limited usage in the Scriptures.

Eve “turned” from her Lord and instead placed all her dependency on her husband only to find out that he, too, as a fallen sinner, would take advantage of her and rule over her. Thus, instead of the resulting gender hierarchy being the norm that God had

prescribed, it turns out that it displays the curse that has fallen on humanity, and on women in particular, because of the Fall described in Genesis 3:1–13.

4. Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22, etc. Women served at the tabernacle and ministered as prophetesses in the Old Testament.

“Women who served” at the tabernacle (Exodus 38:8 and 1 Samuel 2:22) offended the Greek translators of the Septuagint, so they rendered the phrase: “women who fast.” Bushnell quotes a Professor Margoliouth of Oxford as decrying such an idea with the words, “The idea of women in attendance at the Tabernacle is so odious that it has to be got rid of.”⁸ And so it was gotten rid of as the Authorized Version of the King James mistranslated it as “assembled” and others substituted “prayed,” or “thronged,” instead of “served.” But there it stood: women served at the Tabernacle!

But if that is too much to understand, what shall we say of a Miriam, a Deborah, or a Huldah? Miriam is called a “prophetess” in Exodus 15:20 as she led the women in singing the song Moses and the Israelites had just sung in Exodus 15:1–19. True, she, along with the Chief High Priest Aaron, was censured for her complaining about Moses marrying a Cushite woman. But, if Aaron too fell under the same judgment, yet he survived in his position through the grace of God, why not allow the same for Miriam?

If women are not to take the lead over men in any circumstance, why did God send Deborah to motivate Barak so he might carry out the plan of God (Judg. 4:6)? And, further, did not God use another woman, Manoah’s wife, to tell her husband about the announcement of the child she was to bear (Judg. 13:2–7)? And, if the prophet Jeremiah was already ministering in Jerusalem, or not more than a mile or two north of Jerusalem in Anathoth, why did Hilkiah the priest, along with other dignitaries from the palace, seek out Huldah the prophetess about the meaning of the recently discovered Law of Moses (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22)? Huldah held nothing back

as she declared thrice over, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says” (2 Chron. 34:23, 24, 26). Her exposition of a half dozen or more texts from Deuteronomy 29:20, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29 thundered against Judah and her King Josiah!

Nor was God any less displeased with an Abigail (1 Sam. 25), who showed more discernment and wisdom than her foolish husband Nabal, who almost led that whole household into mortal danger had not Abigail intervened. Not only did King David praise her for preventing him from acting foolishly, but Scripture attests to the rightness of her actions over against those of her husband Nabal by saying that, ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal down and he died.

It was not Scripture (not even the Old Testament) that placed women in an inferior position, but a rabbinic set of traditions

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that had been infused later on more with pagan roots than with its own Tanak that introduced these deviant views of women.

5. 1 Timothy 2:8–15. Women are encouraged to lead in public prayers and to teach, but only after they have been taught.

It is none other than our Lord who encourages women to lead in public prayers, presumably at the time of the assembling of the worshipping community in 1 Timothy 2:9. Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, had just told the men that “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer” (v. 8), but he warned men to beware of leading outwardly in prayer while inwardly harboring hostility over some dispute or hidden anger. This is a problem men still need to handle.

From there Paul went on to draw a strong comparison. He began verse 9 with the Greek word *hōsautōs*, meaning “in like manner,” or “similarly.” The NIV and other versions tend to drop out or to soften this linking word (NIV, “I also want...”—just “also”??). The apostle wants the women to do something similar to what he had just instructed the men to do, viz., to pray in public. I say “in public,” because it is prayer with a “lifting up of holy hands” or outstretched as is common when publicly blessing God’s people. Thus, the Greek word for “in like manner” repeats the whole previous sentence, except the warning is different: men have trouble in overly internalizing anger and disputes while trying to pray effectively in public, whereas women have trouble sometimes not realizing God meant them to be beautiful and attractive to men, but not in this situation! Women must dress modestly while offering prayers in public. There is no concern here for what women may look like when they offer their own private prayers in their closet at home surely. Accordingly, the apostle wants women to participate with men in the public service of the Church by offering prayers. There can be no debate over this point unless someone knows how we can get rid of *hōsautōs* in this text.

A. J. Gordon, one of the founders of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, quipped (after noting our passage here and 1 Cor. 11:5 [“Every woman who prays or prophesies]): “It is quite incredible, on the contrary, that the apostle should give himself the trouble to prune a custom, which he desired to uproot, or that he should spend his breath condemning a forbidden method of doing a forbidden thing.” Exactly so! God wanted women to participate in public services both in prayer and, as we will see, by prophesying; however, they were to be careful of their dress so as not to draw attention to themselves.

Now, the central point of this passage, one indeed that would have been revolutionary for Paul’s day, came in 1 Timothy 2:11—“Let a woman...learn!” This was a real bombshell for that day! Why would anyone ask women to do something like that? The Hebrews did not let their women learn publically, nor did the Greeks, Romans, or the pagans. Why should the Christians start such a strange custom since it had never been heard of or done

by anyone before this?? But Paul is insistent: it is the only imperative in the passage. It is this verb, *manthanō*, “let [the women] learn,” which would have drawn everyone’s attention and potential ire when this was first written. Unfortunately, we do not have a third person imperative form in English, so our “let [them] learn” sounds as if it is mere permission, but do not mistake the apostle’s intention here. He now orders all Christians to teach women the gospel in all its magnificence.

Yes, some respond, but, however she learns, she must do so “in silence,” and “in full submission” [apparently, argue some, to her husband!]. On the contrary, the “subjection” is to her God or alternatively to her teacher, as encouraged in 1 Corinthians 16:16 or Hebrews 13:17. Likewise, it is not total “silence” that is required of the female learner any more than the same “silence” is required of men

when they work or eat their lunches (2 Thess. 3:12). In both cases the Greek word *hēsuchia* is better rendered as “quietness” or, even better, “a quiet spirit.” Thus, it is not an absolute silence that is required here of women any more than of men. But even with this word about the demeanor and attitudes of the female learner noted here, it would not commend itself to Jewish teaching of that time, for the Jewish attitude was: “Let the law be burned rather than committed to a woman” (*y. Soṭah* 3:4, 19^a); “He who teaches his daughter the law is as though he taught her sin” (*m. Soṭah* 3:4). So taught the Talmud.

Fine, may agree some objectors, but why is it that Paul goes on to say in 1 Timothy 2:12 that he does “not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man...”? Had Paul suddenly changed his mind after demanding that women pray in public, prophesy in the body of believers, and be taught?

But, again, we say, if this is an absolute command allowing no exceptions, then why does Paul instruct women to teach other women in Titus 2:4? Should he not also have silenced Priscilla, whose name usually precedes Aquila’s in the Greek order of the names in the Book of Acts (e.g., Acts 18:26, despite how some of the versions put it the other way around), when Aquila clearly taught as well? And Timothy, whose father was a Gentile, attributed all his learning and teaching to his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Some insist they taught him before he was seven years old, as they oddly teach that women should not teach boys once they passed their seventh birthday. I have no idea why: They just simply assert it is so!

So what is the answer?

Yes, Paul is saying in this passage that women must not teach or exercise authority over a man, but the reasons he gives are found in the context that follows: verses 13 and 14. Paul expresses his strong preference and his own desires (though he too has the mind of the Lord even in this), for he uses the Greek word *epitrepō*, “I do [not] permit.” This form is exactly the same form as Paul used in 1 Corinthians 7:7, “I wish that all of you were as I am [= unmarried].” But he does not use the imperative form of the verb now as he did when demanding that women be taught.

So why does he not wish or permit women “to teach [note there should be no comma here, for the Greek text is without our systems of punctuation] or to control a man”?

The reasons are these: Adam was “shaped/formed/molded/fashioned” first. What will throw everything off track here is to view this first reason as an argument from “the orders of creation,” i.e., Adam was created first and then came Eve. If this argument were held consistently, then the animals might be demanding their rights since they got here even before Adam was created! But, Paul did not use the Greek word *ktizō*, “to create,” but *plassō*, which is also used, as I believe it is used here, of “the orders of education,” not the orders of creation. It is the same root from which we today get our word for “plastic.” It refers in Greek to all sorts of formative thinking, teaching, and action in society, life, and both formal and informal teaching. Therefore, Paul’s restriction, or wish—however we desire to view it here—is on women only so long as they remain untaught. Presumably (for, how else can we avoid formulating an unnecessary contradiction between Paul’s teaching and his practices as taught and permitted elsewhere in Scripture?), as soon as the women were taught, they would be allowed to teach and exercise leadership much as some did in the examples already noted from the Old Testament.

Adam had a head start on Eve in education, for God walked and talked with him in the Garden of Eden until he got lonely. That is how Satan, the snake, was able to trick her. It appeared as if she had planned to hold her peace, but, when “The Serpent” (*hannāhāš*) subtly suggested that God had set up impossibly narrow rules and then even went on deliberately to distort what God had said, Eve almost involuntarily sprang to defend God as well as the couples’ own standing and thus was beguiled and drawn into the vortex of the Evil One’s trickery and deception. Why Adam did not intervene, taught as he was, I cannot say! He just let Eve rattle on, which was foolish! So that is what Paul teaches here: Adam himself was not “deceived,” but Eve was “thoroughly deceived” (the phrasing uses the same verb, but adds an intensifying preposition attached to the same verb for Eve). The only way you can deceive or trick someone is to do so when they have not been taught. It is this Greek verb, *exapataō*, “to thoroughly deceive,” that shifts the word *plassō* from the secondary meaning “to form,” as in creation, to the primary meaning usually associated with this verb: “to shape [socially or educationally].” Thus, according to Paul, the two reasons women should not teach are: (1) they have not as yet had a chance to be taught, and (2) they can all too easily be tricked and deceived when they have not yet been taught. Unfortunately, Adam too sinned, but did so being fully cognizant of what was going on: he just ate! Eve, on the other hand, seemed to be really misled and attacked as if in an ambush, because she had not as yet had all the advantages of walking and talking with God in the garden of Eden or of learning as had Adam.

And then there is the extremely difficult verse of 1 Timothy 2:15, for which some thirty major interpretations exist. But the context is the determiner, so the flow of the argument is this: Do not attempt to put down women just because Eve was really

deceived. Remember, God chose a woman through whom the promised child came and not a man! So, men, be careful and kind in your assessments and in your comments about these women that God has given to end our loneliness.

With this understanding of 1 Timothy 2:8–15, we can see now how Paul could also allow women to “pray and prophesy” in 1 Corinthians 11:5 and even be more emphatic in 1 Corinthians 14:31 where “all may prophesy” so that “all may learn” and “all may be encouraged.” The same “all” who were learning and being encouraged made up the identity of those who may prophesy—“all.” If some wish to cavil over the word “prophesy,” it can be noted in 1 Corinthians 14:3 that “everyone who prophesies speaks to mortals for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.” That sounds like a definition of preaching, does it not?

6. 1 Corinthians 14:34–38. The Talmud, not the Old Testament law, taught that women must be silent and only talk at home.

The NIV, along with other translations, errs badly by interpretively giving a capital letter to the word “Law” in verse 34. The problem simply put is this: nowhere in the whole Old Testament does it teach or even imply what is claimed here! No law in the entire Old Testament, much less the Torah, can be cited to teach that a woman “must be in submission” and “remain silent” and, if she wants to



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know or ask about anything, she “should ask [her own] husband at home.” Women spoke freely in public in both testaments.

It was in the Jewish synagogues where women were not allowed to speak. Thus, the “law” referred to here may be the Jewish Oral Law, the same one Jesus referred to in the Sermon on the Mount, when he too corrected, “You have heard it said,” which he contrasted with the written word of Scripture. Yes, the Talmud taught that “out of respect to the congregation, a woman should not herself read the law publicly” (*b. Meg.* 23^a), implying that a woman shamed herself if she spoke formally in a gathering of men.¹⁰

One scholar has singled out our interpretation of this passage as an example of a hermeneutical “fallacy” in interpretation. But let this scholar just point to the place in God’s “law” where any of these concepts are taught or even alluded to and he can retain his labeling of this view as a “fallacy.” But failing that, he should recognize the text calls for a repudiation of all alternative views that in some way or another demand that these three teachings are ordained and prescribed by God.

Thus, if Paul is not quoting from Scripture, but rather from a letter of inquiry that was sent to him by the Corinthians, asking if they too should observe such rules of quietude for women in a church which uses rabbinic teaching as its norm,¹¹ can we show any other places where the same type of quoting from external sources is used by Paul as a basis for a following rebuttal? Yes, in 1 Corinthians 6:12, 8:8, and 10:23 Paul quotes an outside aphorism, “All things are lawful for me.” But Paul immediately refutes such a statement as he does in 1 Corinthians 14:36. Paul shouts, “What?” “Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones [masculine plural] it has reached?” I would put this popularly: You can’t really be serious, can you? sneers Paul. That you guys are the *only* ones able to get the word of God?

If that is so, what was Pentecost all about? Did we not see the “now,” even if it was not all of the “not yet” of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–29, where the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all regardless of their age, *gender*, or ethnicity? Brothers and sisters, the Holy Spirit came upon women as well as men: the text says so! And what shall we say about Psalm 68:11? There it proclaims: “The Lord gave the word: Great was the company of the [women] preachers!” for the word for “preachers” is a feminine plural form [Note the NASB rendering of this text]. Oh my, as one of my teachers once said, the easiest way to detect that you are dealing with a dead horse is if you prop it up on one end, the other end will fall down! That is what so many are doing with their interpretations of these texts.

7. 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Women are to exercise authority and veils are not required.

We have already noted the Old Testament background for the women to have strength, power, or authority invested upon themselves in Genesis 2:18. That is, no doubt, what Paul was alluding to in 1 Corinthians 11:10. We also noted how false and thoroughly intrusive was the thought that a “veil as a sign of

authority” was forced into the translations of this verse from the days of the Gnostic religions both in Paul’s day and in subsequent times. Paul did not, nor should we, allow for any parts of such substitutions for the Word of God that stands written! Away with all impositions of a “veil” or veiled references!

Now, at the heart of this passage in 1 Corinthians 11:1–16 is Paul’s desire to stop the practice that had come over from the Synagogue, where men veiled their heads in the worship service. The head covering that was used was called a *tallit*, worn by all men during the morning prayers and on Sabbath days and Holy Days. This *tallit* was also worn by the *hazzan* whenever he prayed in front of the ark, and by the one who was called up to read the scroll of the law at the “reading desk,” known as the *almemar*. The *hazzan* was the chief leader of the Synagogue. Remarkable, as well, is the fact that the Romans also veiled when they worshipped, so both the Jewish and Roman converts would have been accustomed to such veiling practices as part of the liturgy of the worship service.

From the Jewish perspective, Paul was anxious to make clear that such a veiling of the *tallit* was not only a sign of reverence to God, but, unfortunately, it was also a sign of condemnation for the sin and of the guilt of its wearer before the Almighty. But how could such signs be worn when “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus?”¹²

Paul will, thus, forbid men to be veiled. He will permit a woman to be veiled, but it is only by permission, not by obligation that he does so, for his real preference here also is for women likewise to be unveiled before God, men, and angels, especially when women are addressing God in prayer. On the contrary, women should not feel embarrassed about having their heads uncovered, for their hair is given to them as their “glory.” In fact, the Church has no prescribed rule or custom about needing a veil.

Men and women are not independent of one another (1 Cor. 11:12), for God made woman “for [*dia* with the accusative] the man,” while God now brings all men “through [*dia* with the genitive] the woman.” Anyway, “All things are of God,” so who gets bragging rights or one-up-manship here?

Conclusion

The Scriptures are far from being repressive, hostile, or demeaning to women; instead they constantly elevate women and give them places of honor and credit along with their male counterparts. Even in the matter of both males and females being given a head of hair, they are equal. In 1 Corinthians 11:15, the woman is given her hair *anti* (“in place of”; “instead of”) a chapeau, hat, or covering. And, if anyone is unnerved over the whole matter of requiring women to wear some kind of covering, then Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:16, “We have no such practice” that requires women to wear a covering. Note even here, how the translations reverse the whole meaning of the Greek text and say, as the NIV says, “We have *no other* practice” (emphasis ours), which infers this is the only one, and that is that women must wear a covering when they worship. How difficult it is to reverse some habits and traditions, much less some translations!!

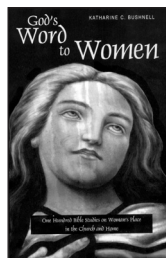
From insights such as these gained in a lifetime devoted to study of the Bible, I have realized, indeed, that together men and women are “joint heirs of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7, 11), submitting themselves to the Lord and to each other (Eph. 5:21). Each owes to the other love, respect, and an appreciation for the sphere of authority given to each one as part of the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are never gender-coded in Scripture, but they are meant for the blessing of the whole body of Christ.

May Christ’s Church take the lead in setting forth a whole new standard for the place and ministry of women even against a confusing background and cacophony of a radical women’s movement of our day that has other goals in mind than those posed for us in these Scriptures. *Sola Scriptura* must be the rallying point once again as it has been time after time in history. May Christ’s Church find the rest, comfort, and admonition of Scripture on the teaching of women and their ministries to be God’s final word for our day as it has been in the past!

Endnotes

1. I am indebted for the argument that follows to a marvelous recent work by Thomas Howe, *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (no city listed: Advantage Books, 2004).
2. Thomas Howe, *Objectivity*, 463.
3. *Ibid.*, 465.
4. For examples of my earlier contributions on this topic, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Paul, Women and the Church,” *Worldwide Challenge* (Sept. 1976): 9–12; *idem* “Shared Leadership,” *Christianity Today* 30 (Oct. 3, 1986): 12,1.
5. R. David Freedman, “Woman, a Power Equal to Man,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (1983): 56–58.
6. Theodotion’s rendering is “turning,” as Katharine C. Bushnell explains in her *God’s Word to Women* (often privately printed since the final edition came in 1923) ¶¶ 128–145. However, Symmachus’s Greek rendering followed Aquila’s suggestion by rendering it by the Greek word, *hormē*, meaning “impulse.” Aquila, noted Bushnell, was a proselyte to Judaism, who followed the Jewish scholars of the second century. The *Talmud*, which is technically not a translation of the Bible, but a listing of traditions, teaches that there were ten curses pronounced over Eve, and in the fifth, sixth, and ninth of these curses, the word, “lust,” is used to render the Hebrew word *tēshūqā*. Thus, in Origin’s *Hexapla* (a six column listing of all the variant readings of Scripture he knew about), Aquila’s column rendered the word there “coalition,” or “alliance,” which Bushnell says is not all that an unnatural sense “since Eve is represented as turning from God to form an alliance with her husband.”
7. Bushnell, ¶ 139.
8. *Ibid.*, ¶ 151.
9. Adoniram Judson Gordon, “The Ministry of Women,” *Missionary Review of the World* 7, new series (Dec. 1894).
10. See Bushnell, ¶¶ 201–02.
11. *Ibid.*, ¶ 201: “The Apostle Paul is here quoting what the Judaizers in the Corinthian church are teaching—who themselves say women must ‘keep silence’ because Jewish law thus taught.” Her proof is detailed in 203ff.
12. *Ibid.*, ¶ 241: “Where the practice has ceased of veiling in sign of guilt and condemnation before God and His law, this whole teaching, in its literal sense, has no application.”

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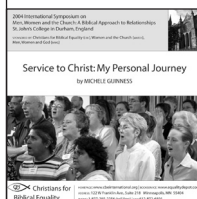


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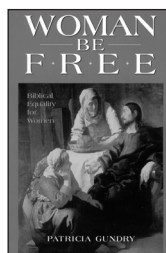


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