

WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

By Ralph Johnson

1Tim 2:11 *Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. 15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*

1Tim 2:11-15 Analyzed

11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

“**Silence**” is a translation of the Greek word, *hesuchia* (Strong’s #2271) found four times in the New Testament, in the King James Translation is the three other times rendered “quietness.”

Thayer’s Lexicon defines it as,

1) *quietness*

1a) *description of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others*

2) *silence.*

Here it is placed in contrast to being a teacher over men. It does not necessarily mean she must be totally mute. Some versions translate it, “*in quietness.*”

...12 But I suffer not a woman to teach...the man...

Paul’s statement “*I permit not...*” suggests this is in the church over which he would exercise such control.

1Tim 3:15 *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to **behave** thyself **in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.***

Again, regulation of adornment (1Tim 2:9) indicates a public situation. Similarities between this and 1Cor 14:34-35, which specifies “*in the church,*” would further confirm the same.

The church situation may also be indicated by “*teach*” (Greek: “*laleo*”) which is in the present infinitive, indicating a *speaker*. Dana and Mantey Grammar (p. 199) says that “*the present infinitive indicates a condition or process, while the aorist infinitive indicates that which is eventual or particular.*” It gives the example that in the aorist, the word *pisteusai* is to exercise faith on a given occasion, while in the present, *pisteuein* is a believer. However, he concludes “*These distinctions are typical and basal, though plastic in actual usage.*”

The fact that in Acts 18:26, Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila, taught Apollos, may further indicate that outside the assembly it was not improper for women to participate in teaching men.

... nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

“*Usurp authority*” is the King James Translation’s rendering of the Greek word, “*authenteo*” which is used only once in the N.T.. Thayer’s Lexicon says it means:

- 1) one who with his own hands kills another or himself
- 2) one who acts on his own authority, autocratic
- 3) an absolute master
- 4) to govern, exercise dominion over one

Various translations of the word are:

- “Usurp authority over” (KJV, WEB, RWB)
- “Dictate” (REV, Moffatt)
- “Domineer” (Goodspeed)
- “Tell men what to do” (CEV)
- “Have dominion over” (ASV)
- “Have authority over” (NIV, NIB, RSV, NRS, NKJ, NAB, NLT, NJB)
- “Exercise authority over” (NAS, NAU, DBY)
- “Use authority over” (DRA)
- “Have rule over” (BBE, YLT)

Because this word may be used in a dictatorial sense it has been argued that if they are not being dictatorial, women may have authority over men. However, in view of the associated statements, it is clear that this is excluding women from any authority over men in the church. They are “*not to teach..*” but to “*learn in quietness with all subjection.*” This is further reinforced by the explanation in verses 13-15.

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. 15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

This removes the issue from the realm of contemporary cultural considerations, which is commonly claimed to limit it only to the attitudes of the day. Paul bases his position on the order and purpose of woman’s creation, and woman’s role in the fall at the beginning. The consequence of her offense was declared by God:

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

The real issue being bucked against by those who deny these passages restrict women from leadership in the church is whether women should be in subjection to men.

To challenge this it is common to attempt to make the passage seem absurd by portraying it to mean that women must have children in order to be saved. Actually, it intended to *reassure* women that they did not need to become teachers to please God. They will be saved in their roles as wives and mothers, *if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety*. Salvation was not dependent upon having children. Paul even commends remaining unmarried (1Cor 7:8, 34-35).

The woman's role is in teaching younger women (Tit 2:4) and ruling, over their households (1Tim 5:14).

1COR. 14:34-37 ANALYZED

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. 36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? 37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

“What saith the Scriptures?” It does not seem possible in human language to be more explicit. As Barnes says, “*No rule in the New Testament is more positive than this; and however plausible may be the reasons which may be urged for disregarding it, and for suffering women to take part in conducting public worship, yet the authority of the apostle Paul is positive, and his meaning cannot be mistaken.*” (Barnes Notes on 1Cor 14:34).

Let us begin by considering the setting. The problem in chapters 12-14 was that some in the Corinthian church were disputing about spiritual gifts, putting the emphasis on tongues as being greatest (much like we see in Charismatic churches today). In chapter 12, Paul points out that all of the gifts came from the same Spirit and all were important to the Body. In 13 he shows that Love is the greatest gift. In 14 he shows that in the church, because tongues without interpretation can not edify, prophecy is greater. Then he lays down some rules to ensure that the church will be edified, which included restricting women from speaking.

Some of the women were using tongues and prophecy as an excuse to disregard their God-ordained role of submission (as we also see in Charismatic churches). The solution given was, “*be silent.*” The excuse that they needed to speak to get answers to questions was answered by, “*let them ask their husbands at home.*”

“**Women,**” translated from the Greek word, *gunaikees* (Strong's #1135) which Thayer's Lexicon defines as, “A woman of any age whether a virgin, or married or a widow.”

“**Your**” (*hymoon* 5216) is of doubtful origin but would not be restricted to wives. “*Your women*” could just as well refer to all women of the church. If married women are expected keep silent, unmarried women would surely also be restricted.

“**Churches**” (*ekkleesia* 1577). Has reference to any group “called out” (cf. “assembly” Ac. 19:39, 41), but here refers to the body of Christians (1Cor 12:12-14). The plural has reference to the individual gatherings, or congregations. This should not be confused with private discussions such as Priscilla and Aquila teaching Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).

“**Silent**” (*sigao* 4601). This word is used nine times in the New Testament. (Luke 9:30; 20:26; Acts 12:17; 15:12-13; Rom. 16:25; 1Cor. 14:28, 30, 34) and is the strongest Greek word for silence. The present imperative connected with “in the churches” indicates that in that place or situation, they were to keep silent. The same word is used in verse 28 of those speaking in tongues to be silent in the absence of an interpreter, and in verse 30 concerning prophets when another is speaking. Here it restricts women from speaking “*in the church.*”

OBJECTION: Silence of tongues does not require silence in other situations, therefore the command for women to be silent so far as asking questions does not require them to be silent from speaking to the church.

ANSWER:

First, the admonition against asking questions is not the primary point. It is in the second verse (14:35). The primary point is in 1Corinthians 14:34, *let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law.*

Secondly, 1Tim 2:11-12, also speaking of behavior in the church, firmly closes any imagined loophole by its statement that women are not to teach men.

*11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12 **But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.***

“**Speak**” (*laleo* 2980). As we have noted above, Dana and Mantey Grammar (p.199) says, “*the present infinitive indicates a condition or process, while the aorist infinitive indicates that which is eventual or particular.*” It gives the example that in the aorist, the word *pisteusai* is to exercise faith on a given occasion, while in the present, *pisteuein* is a believer. Thus, women are certainly excluded from being speakers in church.

Because Paul was speaking of a continuing situation rather than a one-time incident, the present infinitive was the natural choice, even if it covered total silence. This applied to the women as a group and was to be observed “*in all the churches.*”

However, Dana and Mantey conclude: “*These distinctions are typical and basal, though plastic in actual usage.*” This may indicate the exclusion of women may be extended to all public statements.

Winer’s Greek Grammar says, “*Hence in parallel passages we sometimes find the infinitive aorist and infinitive present employed in the same relation; ...It appears, on the whole, that where the infinitive present and the infinitive aorist may be used indiscriminately, the latter is the more common...*” (6th Ed. p. 333*?).

“**Obedience**” (*hupotasso* 5293). This is formed of two words which together mean, “under authority” and carries the idea of keeping themselves in a state of submission.

Rather than mere cultural factors “*the Law*” (writings of Moses) is cited for authority (see Gen. 3:16. cf. 1Tim. 2:11-14). “*Silence*” is identified as equivalent to “submission,” while “*speaking*,” in this circumstance, is regarded as lack of submission.

Some say that the restriction only had reference to speaking in tongues and prophesying. However, “**learn**” clearly goes beyond that. This anticipates attempts to circumvent the admonition by claiming that they needed to speak to get their questions answered.

The primary problem was (and is) women’s lack of submission to men. So, various schemes have been contrived to circumvent the meaning. One way is to speculate special modifying circumstances. Thus, some hypothesize that this was said because the women sat on one side of the isle and the men on the other and women were hollering questions across to their husbands.

Such claims seem contrived to evade the obvious intent of the passage. One can only wonder why it would be any more proper for husbands to create disorder by shouting across to their wives!

One problem with such claims is that the previous verse (34) does not make any reference to questions as the focus of concern.

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

The reason given for her silence is that it would violate her proper role of subjection.

Secondly, verse 35 begins with, “**and if they will learn anything...**” “*And*” indicates an additional or supplementary consideration. The additional focus is on the question of how women could “*learn*” anything if they are not permitted to speak.

Nothing is said about women publicly questioning their husbands. The picture is them raising questions in the congregation. If it was o.k. for women to publicly teach it seems strange that distinction was not made more clearly. As it is stated, the ordinary reader throughout the centuries has been left with the impression that women are not to speak publicly.

Another attempt to discredit the injunction is to imagine that Paul is only prohibiting **ignorant** questions. Again, is an ignorant question by a man any more or less acceptable than by a woman? Who shall say that it is speaking of foolish questions since Paul did not? He simply specified that this applied if a woman desired to “**learn anything.**”

A third attempt is by an appeal to the Greek word, “*eperontatosan*” (3 person, plural, present, imperative, active of *operontao*), translated “ask.” It is pointed out that the prefix, “*ep*”

intensifies the word, “erotao” and therefore means to question or interrogate intensively, “grill,” or be argumentative.

While *eperatao* can mean to “grill” it is not at all confined to intensive or repeated questioning (Mark 7:17; 8:5, 23, 27; 9:11; 10:17).

The intensification of the word is from the very mild word, *erotao* which means to make an entreaty, being 35 times translated with some form of “beseech,” “prayed,” or “desired.” in the A.V.. The intensification in *eperotao* moves it from a simple request to a direct question. Much like our word, “ask” it may be used either as a request for knowledge or as a demand for an answer. However, it is a fact that in actual usage the two words have overlapping areas (cf. Matt. 16:13 “erotao” with Mark 8:27, “eperotao,” Matt. 21:24 & Luke. 20:3 with Mark 11:29; Luke 9:45 with Mark 9:32).

The extent of intensity must be determined by the context. It seems unlikely that this would be telling the women to DEMAND answers of their husbands at home. It was just as wrong for a man as a woman to get quarrelsome at church, and it would be just as improper at home.

Notice that following his response to the question of how she could “learn anything,” he returns to the reason for her to ask her husband at home --”*for it is shameful for a woman to speak in the church.*” He does not say, “for it is shameful to demand answers in church.”

Others have contended that the admonition is only respecting a transitory cultural view. One wonders whether their concern is a mere cultural consideration or whether the present culture is simply arguing this to justify its practice. By reading an assumption into a passage almost any statement may be made to mean something else. The problem with a “cultural” explanation is that it is purely speculative with no clear scriptural support.

Paul says it is a “shame” for a woman to speak in the church. The “shame” could refer to the cultural attitudes of the day. However in Eph. 5:12, sinful things were also said to be “shameful.”

He also says that the things he wrote were the “*commandments of the Lord*” and that this was the practice of “*all the churches.*” In view of this, we need to be very cautious about restricting it to a narrow cultural limitation.

The absolutely clear and fundamental point is that from the beginning God’s law required women to be in subjection (Gen 3:16; 1Cor 11:3, 7, 9, 10; 14:34; 1Tim 2:11-14; 1Pet 3:1, 5). It was based on what “*the law*” said,¹ which clearly refers back to Genesis 2:18 which says that woman was created to be a “*help meet*” for the man and Gen. 3:16 which says, “*thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee*” (Gen. 3:16).

However, there is the possibility that while subjection of women was fundamental, the *application* of the principal in the matter of silence in the church may have been in respect to the cultural norms of the day.

¹ The five books of Moses are all sometimes called “the Law” (Gal. 4:21-22)

The issue has been clouded by questions about whether this only applies to wives, and how women without husbands, or who have unbelieving husbands, can learn; whether this excludes them from the singing and prayers; whether they can answer questions put to them; and even whether she can holler “FIRE!” if the place is burning down.

In any case, God’s will cannot be nullified by foolish questions, whether or not it is convenient or desirable to us. Ridicule and appeals to prejudice are not a sound basis for discounting what the Bible says, and an exceptional situation does not nullify God’s rule.

The problem of how single women can learn is easily resolved through the older women teaching them, through listening to public teaching, and through access to the Bible and biblical publications, or to asking men. The problem is not that they cannot learn without publicly asking questions, but that this is being used as a justification for women to become preachers.

From my perspective, I have no problem with women participating in class discussions, prayer, sharing in song, or even sharing a thought with the congregation. There has rarely been any problem in the assembly that I would consider a violation of submission, though I have wondered sometimes whether we might be overstepping things. I have found that it works well to simply present what the scriptures teach and let women decide for themselves how they will account to God. Generally, I find them not abusive of that trust. However, outside the assembly, there have been a few instances where women (and men) have become aggressive in trying to control others which I have considered overstepping the boundaries of due respect, and have had to firmly withstand.

All of the attempts to get around the text to the contrary, the precedent of Jesus was that He chose men to preach. The twelve apostles were men.

Throughout the Bible, it is God’s clear design that men were to function as leaders. There were some exceptions, which is God’s right, but this was the general rule.

Isa. 3:12. *As for my people, children are their oppressors, and **women rule over them.** O my people, they that lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy paths.*

Even the seven chosen and ordained to care for the daily ministrations to the widows in Acts 6, distinguished from the “*ministry of the word*” as being “*the ministry (diakonia) of tables,*” were men. Why were men, rather than women, chosen to care for the widows?

OBJECTION: Based on the fact that some manuscripts have verses 34 and 35 of 1Cor 14 after verse 40, modern critics believe that the passage was not in the original.

ANSWER:

The manuscripts cited are from the fifth century and following. The earlier and majority of the manuscripts have 34, 35 where we find them. The fact is that even in reversed order, they are there. It is obvious that the real problem is the reluctance of liberal scholars to accept the Scriptural teaching about women.

ARGUMENTS URGED IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN PREACHERS

Ex. 15:20. Miriam prophesied publicly.

ANSWER: That was in the Old Testament, not in the church.

Acts 2:17-18. “Your daughters shall prophesy”

ANSWER: It does not say this would be in the church.

1Cor. 11:5, 13 indicates that the women were prophesying in the church.

ANSWER:

The passage is dealing with the fact that some of the women’s dress was inconsistent with their role of subjection. It does not say they were praying and prophesying publicly in the presence of men. Even if we view this as inferred, it does not say it was approved. 1Cor 14:34-36 and 1Tim 2:11-12 clearly restricts them from teaching and speaking in the assembly.

How eager some are to milk a supposed inference from 1Cor 11 to support women speaking publicly but how they ignore what it says about women wearing long hair and covering their heads as a sign of subjection to their husbands. As I said previously, the real issue is the subordinate role God ordained for women.

ARGUMENT: 1Tim 3:11 gives qualifications for women deacons.

“Even so must the women be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.”

The word, “*gune*” (1135) translated “wives” in the King James Version is the general word, “women.” Context determines how it should be translated. Thus, it could refer to women deacons.

If it referred to the wives of deacons, why is nothing said about the need for good qualifications of wives of elders? Would not elders need faithful wives as much or even more than deacons?

ANSWER:

At one time in my early ministry I thought this might be correct. However, subsequent investigation indicated it was without warrant.

1. First, the women are not called “deacons” in the passage.
2. Secondly, there is nothing in the passage that would not fit wives.
3. The word for “*wives*” in verse 11 (“*gune*”) is identical to that in verse 12 where it says that deacons should be the “*husband of one wife*.”
4. “*Husband of one wife*,” was specified as a qualification of deacons. The qualifications for the women in verse 11 does not include being the “*wife of one husband*” (as in the case of widows –1Tim. 5:9). If both were deacons, would not a parallel qualification of being the wife of one man have been included for women?
5. There are clearer ways to have indicated he was speaking of both men and women deacons. For example, he could have simply called both “deacons.”

6. If “deacons” meant both men and women, there would have been no need to restate for women some of the qualifications given for deacons.
7. Why are the proto-type deacons in Acts 6 all men? Caring for the widows would seem to be an especially proper place for women to be included.

OBJECTION: Why does it mention wives of deacons, but not of elders?

ANSWER:

Note that it does not say, “wives of deacons.” It simply says, “wives must be...” The reason for leaving it open appears to be that this refers to both. There was no need to repeat it for both elders and deacons. It would seem appropriate that there should be some standards that must be met by the wives of elders and deacons. Success of husbands very much depends on behavior of wives.

Some suggest that deacon’s wives shared the office of deacons, and thus, in their ministration would need these qualifications. That certainly is an appealing concept, and wives of deacons would in many ways share in their husband’s efforts, but we see no example of wives of deacons being ordained with them.

In any case, since deacons were not required to be “*apt to teach*” (1Tim 3:2) the whole issue of women deacons is irrelevant to the issue of women teaching in the church.

ARGUMENT:

The “*aged women*” (*presbutis* #4247) in Titus 2:3 is the feminine form of the same word in the masculine “*presbutees*” (#4246) translated “aged men” in Titus 2:2.

ANSWER:

That is correct but neither of these words is used for the office of an elder – “*presbuteros*” (#4245), a similar word in adjective form.

In any case, the context of Titus 2:3-5 clearly represents this as the normal sense of “*older women*” rather than an office in the church. The older women were to teach the “*young women*.” It says nothing of older women teaching men in the church.

ARGUMENT: If women have the gift of being able to speak, they should use it for God.

ANSWER:

They should use the gifts God gave them, in the way God directed. God specifically excluded women from speaking in the church.

ARGUMENT: 1Cor. 14:31 indicates women were to prophesy in the church.

“*For ye may ALL prophesy one by one...*”

ANSWER:

The restrictions that followed clearly prohibited them from doing so in the church. Even if we were to assume that they may prophesy publicly, they would still be restricted from teaching or exercising authority over men (1Tim. 2:11-12). Prophesying is a message directly from God through inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2Pet. 1:19-21).

1Cor 14:37 *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the **commandments of the Lord**.*

ARGUMENT:

Philip had four virgin daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

ANSWER:

Nothing is said about them doing so in the in the presence of men at church.

ARGUMENT:

Deborah was a Judge of Israel.

ANSWER:

This was in the Old Testament, not in the New Testament. It was in Israel, not in the church.

Even then, it was clearly an exceptional situation, similar to other exceptions within God's province. For example, due to necessity, God held David guiltless for eating the shewbread in the tabernacle, which otherwise would have required his death (Mat 12:3-4).

God has the right to make exceptions. We do not. Exceptions made by Him do not nullify His rules.

Deborah did not take this authority upon herself. She was appointed by God, not by men. Furthermore, we know nothing of whether she ever spoke to any public gathering of the Israelites. She served as judge, not as priest in the temple. The priests were all males.

Barak seems to have been called to act as Deborah's spokesman in leading Israel, and she only went with him at his insistence. In any case, that is a far cry from speaking to the church, and cannot nullify the prohibition in 1Corinthians 14.

The Oxford Companion to the Bible, edited by Bruce M Metzger and Michael D. Coogan in an article written by Valerie Braahmsen says,

"The New Testament and early church fathers provide preliminary data on women. The earliest evidence, from Paul's letters, suggests that women functioned as dynamic leaders of the movement (Philippians 4:2,3, Romans 16), deacons (Romans 16:1,2), apostles (Romans 16:7), and missionaries (I Cor 16:19; Romans 16:3,4)."

ANSWER: Women certainly played an important role in the progress of the early church but that hardly indicates they were preachers. Check the passages cited. How does a reference to women ministering to Jesus (Mark 15:40-41; Mt 27:55-56; Luke 8:1-3) prove they were "*dynamic leaders of the movement*"? The fact that no women were appointed among the twelve apostles stands in bold contrast to such assumptions. Women attended to the needs of Jesus, but nothing is said of him sending them out to preach.

She then argues:

“The gospels relate that Jesus had women followers as well as men (Mark 15:40-41; Mt 27:55; Luke 8:1-3) and treated women as equals (cf. John 4:9,27; Luke 10:38-42); it was also women who were the first to bear witness to his resurrection. The Acts of the Apostles mention the four daughters of Philip who prophesied (21:9); Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant and the head of her household (16:14,15); the missionary couple, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18); house-church leaders (12:12); and prominent converts (17:4,12).”

ANSWER:

John 4:9, 27. How does asking for a drink of a Samaritan woman indicate Jesus considered her an “equal,” much less a preacher in the church? He was kindly, but the discussion that followed certainly indicated they were not “equals.” She was not even a Christian.

Luke 10:38-42. How does the fact that Jesus stayed at Martha’s house with Mary and Lazarus, indicate Jesus considered them his “equals”? Jesus told Martha that Mary, who sat at his feet and listened, had chosen “the better part.” Listening to Jesus does not make one an official in the church.

She cites the fact that women were the first to “*bear witness to his resurrection.*” So? Was it done in the church? Did that automatically give them an office to preach in the public assemblies?

Abrahamsen: “*The Acts of the Apostles mention the four daughters of Philip who prophesied (21:9).*”

ANSWER:

So? Where does it say they did so in the church?

Abrahamsen: “*Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant and the head of her household*” (Acts 16:14-15).”

ANSWER:

So? Was she head of the church? At the time she wasn’t even a Christian.

Abrahamsen: “*...the missionary couple, Priscilla and Aquila*” (Acts 18).

ANSWER: Where does it say that Priscilla spoke in the church? Aquila and Priscilla had a church in their house (1Cor. 16:19) but nothing is said of Priscilla preaching.

Abrahamsen: “*...house-church leaders*” (Acts 12:12).

ANSWER: Some of the church was praying in the house of Mary. It says nothing about her being a “leader” or speaking publicly.

Abrahamsen: “*...and prominent converts*” (Acts 17:4, 12).

ANSWER: So, a lot of prominent women were converted. How does that translate into them preaching in the church?

Abrahamsen: “*Thus, in pre-Pauline and Pauline Christian communities, women appear to have functioned almost identically to men.*”

ANSWER: If they functioned “*identically to men*” why were none of the apostles women? Where do we see Jesus sending women out to preach? Why were only men in Acts 6 chosen to care for the widows?

Abrahamsen: “*...In fact, it is possible that more women than men were house-church leaders, hosting vital prayer meetings that became the kernel of the movement.*”

ANSWER: Where does it say they were “*house church leaders,*” and why should hosting a prayer meeting indicate they were preachers in the church?

Abrahamsen: “*At least one woman deacon, Phoebe, is recorded in the New Testament (Romans 16:1,2), and she functioned as an official teacher and missionary in the church at Cenchreae.*”

ANSWER: Absolutely incredible, what some people will read into a few simple words when they have an agenda to accomplish. As Mcaulay has well said, “The law of gravitation would still be controverted, if it interfered with vested interests.”

Romans 16:1. *I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 2 that ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself also hath been a helper of many, and of mine own self.*

This says not one word about her teaching or being a missionary. All it says is that she needed help with her business and had cared for many. How does that translate into public preaching?

As for her being called a “*servant* (Greek: “*diakonos*”) *of the church,*” there is nothing conclusive to show that she was ordained to the office of deacon. Names for offices are common words normally used to describe a function. Just because a word is used does not indicate it is an office. The same is true of other words such as “*apostle,*” and “*elder.*” We can only identify these as offices when something, such as specification that the person was “*appointed*” (ordained), qualifications were required, or when they are grouped with other offices.

For example, we know 1Tim 3:8-13 speaks of the office of a deacon, because qualifications are specified, and this is given in conjunction with elders/bishops. The qualifications for both offices are clearly designed for men (1Tim. 3:1, 4, 5, 11, 12). Furthermore, while the elders were required to be “*apt to teach*” nothing in the qualifications of deacons suggests any teaching ministry. In fact, if the prototype deacons of Acts 6 are any indication, a clear line of distinction is made between those who “*ministered*” in the word (Acts 6:2, 4), and those who “*ministered*” to tables (Acts 6:2). It may further be noted that all seven of those appointed were men. If any place, this would have been the ideal point to include women.

Against this, it may be argued that Stephen and Philip preached. True, but nothing in their office called for it, and the fact that they taught publicly would not override specific restrictions against women doing so (1Cor 14:34-37; 1Tim. 2:11-15).

Perhaps Phebe was a desolate widow. (1Tim 5:3-16) There was official recognition of “widows” who were supported by the church, if they met some very tight restrictions on qualifications (60 years or older, brought up children but had no children or grandchildren to care for them). However, nothing in the passage indicates they ever spoke to the church or directed men.

Abrahamsen: “*Euodia and Syntyche from Philippi (Phil. 4:2, 3) were prominent leaders of that community...*”

ANSWER:

Phil. 4:2 I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

This says they laboured with Paul and others in the gospel. In what role? Did they preach? Or did they teach women and children (Tit. 2:3-4), or perhaps work as helpers in other ways? This says nothing about them preaching in the church and certainly cannot nullify what Paul said in 1Cor 14:34-36 and 1Tim 2:11-15.

Abrahamsen cites Romans 16:7 as indicating Andronicus and Junia were apostles.

ANSWER: The text does not say they were apostles. It says that they were “*of note among the apostles.*”

Abrahamsen: “*The most prominent woman in the New Testament is Priscilla, who worked alongside her husband and was probably the more renowned of the pair (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3,4, Acts 18).*”

ANSWER:

This claim is based on Acts 18:18, 26 and Rom. 16:3, where, in the Greek, her name is given first. However in Acts 18:2 and Rom. 16:19, Aquila’s name is first. Mentioning her name first at times, may mean nothing more than that she was well known and affectionately recognized for being caring, like Phoebe. Even if she took a more aggressive role at times, there is no evidence she spoke in the church. She only shared with her husband in privately teaching Apollos.

Having a church in her house does not make her the preacher. In fact, 1Cor. 16:19, where this is mentioned, gives Aquila’s name first. These kinds of arguments, on their very face are greatly strained, and only serve to spotlight the weakness of the claim. If they had stronger evidence they would not have to rely on things that are so speculative.

Abrahamsen: *“The women Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis in Romans 16 are described as having labored (kopian) for the Lord, the same term Paul used to describe his own evangelizing and teaching activities”*

ANSWER:

Rom. 16:12 just says, *“Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.”*

The use of “*kopiaoo*” (#2872) as evidence that these women were publicly teaching in the church is totally meaningless. The word is in no way confined to public teaching or evangelizing. Many people labor in the Lord without speaking publicly.

As “scholars” often do when they want something to be their way, Abrahamsen then goes on to quote historical sources. She argues that women being subservient developed after apostolic times.

“Bishop Atto of Vercelli (c. 885-961) wrote in several tracts that women were ordained just like men in the ancient church, were leaders of communities, were called elders (presbyters), and fulfilled the duties of preaching, directing and teaching.”

“Female celibacy and other acts of independence led male leaders to disseminate counter-treatises in which they prescribed strict behavior for all women and attempted to bring the entire Christian movement more in line with the overall culture’s ideal of the patriarchal family and household. The New Testament “household codes” (Eph. Col. I Peter) were written by followers of Paul, not Paul himself, and clearly urged women’s subordination to men. The so-called Pastoral letters (Tim and Tit) are also early works accepted into the NT canon. I Tim 2:11,12 forbade women from speaking in church and Tit 1:7-9 assumed that only men would be bishops.”

She then argued:

“Significantly, despite attempts by the hierarchy through the ages to conceal the evidence, there is attestation for women priests into the Byzantine ear. An epistle of Pope Gelasius I (492-496) to bishops in Italy and Sicily mentions in annoyance that women were officiating at the sacred altars and taking part in ecclesiastical affairs imputed only to men. An inscription from Bruttium dating to the end of the 5th century mentions the presbytera Leta, and another from Salona in Dalmatia (425 AD) mentions the presbytera Flavia Vitalia. While these attestations are rare, they confirm that women functioned sacerdotally--and that male bishops occasionally ordained them.”

Other Historical Citations given:

Around 100 AD, Pliny the Younger writes that he found it necessary to torture two female ministers (ministrae) in order to gain more information about the activities of the Christians. (Letters of Pliny X.96) [see also Barnes Notes, Rom 16:1 –R.J.] Was

Pliny simply unable to capture two men ministers? Or, were these two women the best source for Pliny? If so, they must have been exercising a leadership role in the church.

The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) set down requirements for the ordination of deaconesses, and the Apostolic Constitutions includes their ordination prayer.

[The Apostolic Constitutions (300 AD?), book iii, section 2, says, “Ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, **for the ministries toward the women.**”]

Canon 11 of the council of Laodicea (in the 300s) forbade the appointment of elders, indicating that some Christians had been doing this. Dionysius of Alexandria, who died in 264, described as a martyr “the most holy eldress Mercuria” and another as “a most remarkable virgin eldress Apollonia.”

“Further, the church order book the Didascalia (c. 250 AD) specifically allows for the ordination of women deacons. Deaconesses assisted in the baptism of women and anointing them with oil, and in giving instructions to newer women in the faith. They could give communion to women who were sick and unable to meet with the entire church. The ministry of widows was largely that of prayer, fasting, and the laying on of hands on the sick, as specified by the Didascalia and the Apostolic Constitutions.”

The Didascalia was written around 250 AD. It says, “When she sees anything that is hateful, or hears it, let her be as though she saw and heard it not.” In other words, women are forbidden to correct sin and error in the church.

The text further states that, when a widow is asked any questions about the faith, she should not answer, but send the questioner to the leader of the congregation. She is explicitly forbidden to answer questions about idolatry, monotheism and the nature and scope of Christ’s kingdom.

The text claims that if women teach, when the heathen hear it and reject it, the Christian woman who taught is held blameworthy.

The Didascalia insisted that neither the bishop nor a presbyter, nor a deacon, nor a widow should utter a curse, because widows had been appointed to bless. The Didascalia further forbids widows to speak with other Christians.

So, it seems that women had been preaching and teaching. If not, there would have been no reason for the Didascalia to forbid this. (One only forbids what is happening or likely to happen, and which one does not want.)”

ANSWER:

In the first place, the citations confirm the fact that from the times of Timothy and Titus, the church excluded women from public ministry. The fact that women’s public activities were opposed by the church does not indicate it was approved in the Bible. Even if it had later

been accepted by the church, that would not necessarily indicate it was scripturally acceptable.

Bonnie Thurston, Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological, an ordained minister of the Christian church (Disciples of Christ), in her book, **Women in the New Testament**, in addition to many of the citations above, argues concerning women mentioned in Romans 16:

Euodia and Syntyche, who in Philippians are called co-workers, with the implication of itinerancy.

ANSWER:

Ph'p 4:2 *I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.*

HOW did they labor in the Gospel? It does not say they preached to men in the church.

The phrase "helper of many" (prostatis pollwn) [Rom 16:2] is the Greek equivalent of the Latin patrona. It is a hapax legomena (a phrase appearing once only in the New Testament). The usual meaning of the phrase is "leader," "president," "superintendent," or "patron." See the verb form in I thess 5:12 and I Tim 3:4-5 and 5:17. Probably the word meant patroness, so Phoebe, like Lydia of Acts 16, may have been a woman of enough wealth and social position to care for a church in her home. She would have been patron of her community and, as such, would have represented the church in dealings with the government or courts. The feminine form of the word occurs in the Septuagint, where, in general, it is used for stewards of the king's property or for the chief officers over the people (I Chr. 27:31; II Chr. 8:10; 24:11 I Esdras 2:12; Sirach 45:24; II Maccabees 3:4.) A masculine form of the word is used 3 times in I Clement, each time referring to Jesus as the guardian of Christians.

ANSWER:

Rom. 16:2. *"She herself also hath been a helper (prostatis #4368) of many, and of mine own self."*

Clearly, this does not mean she was "leader," "president," "superintendent" "over" Paul and the men of the church. "Over" is not in the text. "Patroness," helping Paul and others, may be the usage. That still fails to show that she had any authority over men or spoke in the church. All we see here is that she was a servant ("diakonos") of the church.

"In the 2nd century, Catherine of Alexandria is said to have debated with 50 pagan philosophers, winning many of them to Christ.

"In the 4th century, even with the restrictions the church was placing on women, the pagan philosopher Libanius said, "What women these Christians have!" Christian women, by comparison with pagan women, were active and spoke up."

ANSWER: Speaking up for Christ does not mean that women were scripturally authorized to speak publicly in the church.

CONCLUSION:

There are few statements in the Bible that have not been subverted by some so-called religious “scholar.” The variety, novelty and number of schemes to get around what the Bible says is only exceeded by the capacity of people to imbibe so many self-contradictory assumptions at the same time.

I have never been able to comprehend why the Bible cannot mean what it says. If God did not mean what He said, why did he not say what he meant? If He cannot understandably convey what He meant, who dares to presume that they can say it better? If we cannot trust our creator then who shall we trust? If we are not going to obey what God said then why keep up a farce of following the scriptures?

The devil was the first to come up with other “explanations” as to why God did not mean what he said (Gen., 3:1-19; Matt, 4:1-11; 2Cor. 11:13,14) and since then he has been hard pressed to keep ahead of the ingenuity of man in devising more sophisticated inventions. The trouble with too many people is that they “follow” the Bible like a wheelbarrow--pushing it where they want it to go.

Make no mistake about it. The real issue in all of this is whether women are to be in subjection to men. The bottom line is whether we are going to accept what the Scriptures say as divine authority from God.

1Tim. 2:11 *Let the woman learn in **silence with all subjection**. 12 **But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to have authority over the man, but to be in quietness**. 13 *For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. 15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.**

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

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

*...37 **If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.***