

OpenTheo

Role of Women in the Church



Some Assembly Required - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg talks about the role of women in the church, specifically addressing the teaching and speaking activities of women. He cites passages in Corinthians and Timothy that forbid women from teaching authority over men and from speaking in church, and recognizes that this goes against modern cultural beliefs. The speaker notes that Paul may have been attempting to avoid offending the culture by making these statements, and emphasizes that it is important to understand what God is saying and to follow his word.

Transcript

Tonight I'll be talking about the activities of women in the church. We've been having a series on what the Bible teaches about the church, and this subject was actually not originally going to be in this series, but somebody told me that I ought to include it, and so I agreed. I thought it was quite fitting since the roles of women in Christianity, I believe, are distinctive of Christianity, and are not simply to conform to the roles of women in the world.

And the same would be true of men and children as well. The gospel calls us to live distinctively Christian lives. Discipleship is to invade every aspect of our lives, and to be very intrusive too.

Discipleship is not supposed to be convenient necessarily. Although I would never wish to make the gospel or what the biblical teaching more inconvenient than the Bible actually does, we should not expect that the Bible calls us to a life as convenient as that which would be lived if we didn't follow Christ. And so we can expect it to go against our grain and to be intrusive, and it certainly does.

And when it comes to talking about what the Bible says about women in the church, now I have taught about the roles of women on many occasions before. Not a whole lot of occasions, but on several. Usually in a different context, talking about marriage and family and things like that.

Tonight I want to talk specifically about women's activity in the church gathering

primarily, and the ministries of women, because there is some confusion about that. Now not everybody in this room attends the same fellowship that I do, and that's fine. But just to give you some background, where I attend fellowship on Sunday mornings, there are two services, an hour each.

The first one is sort of a free-flowing kind of communion service. The service is ended with communion, but during the earlier part of the service, there is singing, and there is prayer, and there is Bible reading. And the church, for reasons I've never asked about, they were already doing this before I came there, and I've never asked why because it never has bothered me, but they have adopted a policy of asking that the men, the heads of the households, be the ones who participate verbally in that service.

Now there is a second service, which is largely a preaching service, but there is some time at the beginning for testimonies and such, and that is not limited to men. There are, you know, women and children can participate in it. Now I had nothing to do with setting those policies.

If somebody asked me whether we should change them or keep them the same, I'm not sure I would have an opinion. I like things the way they are. I'm not so sure I would like them less if they were different.

It's not a problem to me, but there are some women, especially who have attended the first hour, who have wondered why it is that the women don't have a speaking part in that service. And I don't really know how to answer that, since I didn't establish the role, but I suspect it's one of two things. I suspect it is either a desire to follow the scripture, literally, certain scriptures that we'll look at, which, by the way, are subject to a variety of interpretations, but a desire to follow these particular scriptures about women being silent in the church, although, if that were true, it seems like the second service would also forbid them to speak, so I'm not sure if that's the reason.

The other reason that occurs to me, and either of these are commendable reasons, it seems to me, would be that knowing that women, quite generally, are eager to share in most church services, and men are often quiet and reluctant, and in our own culture, the leadership of men in the home is not much encouraged, it may be that this policy was designed in order to simply, as it were, force men to take the lead, which is, I think, a positive thing, too. I don't know what the reasoning is of those who set this particular policy, and I don't object to it at all, but there have been questions that have arisen about that, and if somebody has questions about the policy of that fellowship and those meetings, they'll have to talk to somebody other than me. But some questions have come directed to me as a result of these things about what the Bible teaches about women's activity in the church, women's ministry, and so forth.

And so I'd like to address that, I'd like to address it as comprehensively as I can. Would you turn with me to 1 Corinthians? There are three key passages in the New Testament,

two of them are in 1 Corinthians, which address directly the demeanor and behavior of women in the church. Now, I'm going to read these passages without comment first.

Do not assume that you know what I'm going to say about them before I speak, but I do intend to say something about all of them. The first of these passages is 1 Corinthians 11, verses 2 through 16. And even though I've taught on the roles of women before, I just want you to know that today and yesterday I spent many hours going at it again, looking at it more carefully, looking at the words in the Greek and so forth to try to make sure I'm not missing something.

I even read commentaries, which I don't do very often, but I just want to make sure that there's not something here I'm missing. And I've prepared the most comprehensive treatment of the subject I've ever done before. It may not be as comprehensive as it could be or should be, or as someone else might give, but it's the most I've done up to this date.

In 1 Corinthians 11, verses 2 through 16. Now, I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I deliver them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head. For that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man.

For man is not from the woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for woman, but woman for the man. For this reason, the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels.

Nevertheless, neither is the man independent of the woman, nor woman independent of man in the Lord. For as the woman came from the man, even so man also comes through woman. But all things are from God.

Judge among yourselves, is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? Or it's a shame to him, it says in the King James. But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her, for her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.

Now, I will come back to this and comment on it, but let's look at the second passage. It's shorter, it's in 1 Corinthians 14. And as often been observed, it raises, just reading the

passage, raises questions as to how to harmonize it with the one we just read.

In 1 Corinthians 14, verses 34 through 37, Paul writes, Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

One other passage addresses women's activity in the church, and that would be in 1 Timothy 2. There are other passages that talk about women's activities in general. But we're just looking at the passage tonight that specifically targets the subject of women's demeanor and behavior in church gatherings. And we'll even talk about what that means, church gatherings.

But 1 Timothy 2, verses 12 through 15 is the remaining passage. Paul says, actually it would have been best for me to begin at verse 11, pardon me for leaving that out. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression.

Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with self-control. Now, as you can see, each of these passages has something to say about... well, it actually puts some kind of limitation on the activities of women. Because they do so, these passages are usually viewed as primarily negative.

Don't let women do that. Don't let women do this. Don't let women pray or prostrate with their head uncovered.

Don't let the women speak in the church. Don't let them ask questions of their husbands in the church. Don't let them teach or have authority over a man.

They're negative. And because of that, many have reacted, especially women and sometimes men, who are in sympathy with the plight of women, have reacted negatively to these passages, as if the Bible takes a negative view of women and their contributions in the church. The Bible does not.

The Bible takes an exceedingly positive view. It's just that you have to take the rest of the Scripture, too, and we will look at some of that, to know exactly what God positively says women are supposed to do, allowed to do, required to do, privileged to do. But these passages are talking about what women are not supposed to do.

Now, even having read them, it is not easy to answer the question, well, what can women do in the church and what can they not? Because there are some difficulties that are attached to a number of these, well, all the passages, I suppose, that we read. Let's go back to the first of them. Well, before we do, let me just say this.

There are, I mean, anyone who heard those passages read just now realizes that that goes right against the grain of our modern culture and much of what's taught and practiced in the churches to suggest that women shouldn't teach or have authority, that women should be silent, that it's a shame for a woman to speak in the church, that a woman is the, you know, the man is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man. I mean, this is the kind of thing that modern feminists and most Americans are in some measure fitting of that label. Modern feminists are pretty much riled up by this kind of thing.

And by the way, the church, which in recent centuries has not been very faithful to the word of God, has been intimidated by feminism to the point of either ignoring these passages or explaining them away in some other sense, because after all, you just catch a lot of flack if you stand for what the Bible says, especially on this topic at this particular time in this particular culture. And because of that, you find there are liberal, they may not see themselves as liberal, but I call them liberal, Bible scholars, who have done many things to try to get rid of these passages. I'd like to give you four examples of arguments that are given by what I would call feminist Bible scholars about these passages.

Now, you might say, well, how can a person be a feminist Bible scholar? Or, depending on your own disposition, you might say, how could a person not be a feminist Bible scholar? The fact of the matter is, there are persons who describe themselves as evangelical feminists. Not surprisingly, many of these are women scholars in liberal churches. Some of them are men, male scholars in liberal churches.

In general, they are all what I would call liberals, and that is because I consider them to be not as respectful to the Word of God as Christians are called to be. But they would not think that accusation was fair. Here's what they do with these passages.

The first thing that is done by liberal feminist scholars is to suggest, and this is probably the response of most of the common uneducated feminists too, is to suggest, well, Paul here was reflecting his own prejudice. We remember, of course, Paul was raised a Pharisee, and Pharisees had a very low view of women. We know this.

We know that women were regarded to be at the same level as slaves and dogs and Gentiles in the mind of the Pharisaic Jews. And Paul was raised in the home of a father who was a Pharisee, we're told, and Paul himself pursued a career as a rabbi of the Pharisaic school before he was converted. Now, although a man, when he's converted, changes on many things, sometimes he doesn't change on everything, right away anyway.

And some have said, well, this is just sort of residual prejudice on the part of Paul, just kind of putting women down, thinking women are inferior, just part of that old Pharisaical background of his. However, that doesn't agree with Paul's teaching. I mean, to say that Paul was prejudiced against women just doesn't agree with either Paul's practice or his teaching in general.

In Galatians 3.28, for example, often quoted by feminists, but we who are not feminists are not afraid of the verse either, Paul said, there is no Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free, in Christ. All are one in Christ. And when Paul said that there's no distinction between male and female any more than there is between bond or free or Jew or Gentile, he certainly was not speaking like a prejudiced Pharisee at all.

I mean, Pharisees didn't think Gentiles were okay either. So, I mean, to suggest that Paul was somehow bound up with prejudices and therefore he wrote these unworthy passages restricting women's activity just doesn't really, to me, it doesn't jive. And of course, it reflects a very low view of the inspiration of Scripture to suggest that somehow, although Paul was an inspired apostle, he managed to write a few verses in there that, you know, while the Holy Spirit was taking a nap or something and got his own prejudices in there, is, to my mind, too low a view of the authority of Scripture and of the inspiration of Scripture for my taste.

A second argument they used is that it's not so much that Paul was prejudiced, but the society to which he wrote was prejudiced. That he was writing to churches in highly chauvinistic cultures. And it wasn't so much that Paul agreed with this restriction on women, but that he knew that if women exhibited the kind of freedom that Paul believed in, that the cultures would be scandalized and that people would just, you know, write off the church as a bunch of, you know, rebels or something and be offended by the women's liberty.

And so, in order to avoid offending the culture, he basically put such restrictions on women. Well, Paul did believe that we should avoid offending the culture unnecessarily. That's true.

However, if you study the Roman and the Greek culture, it does not provide any support for this argument. Because in both the Roman and the Greek culture, the women were not restricted from ministry in their religion. In Corinth, for example, two of these passages were written to Corinth, there was a temple there to Aphrodite with a thousand priestesses.

That's a euphemism in that religion. They were prostitutes in the temple, but that was part of their priestess duty. And Ephesus had the temple of Diana there with some similar women functioning.

That women could function as priestesses in those very lands where these letters were

written to, would indicate that Paul was not following the sensitivities or deferring to the sensitivities of those cultures in forbidding women to some of the things that he forbade them to do. Those cultures were not scandalized by women in those roles. Many of the mystery religions that were commonly held throughout the Roman Empire had women as prophetesses and priestesses.

And would not at all have been offended if the church had women pastors or elders or whatever. I mean, Paul's writing cannot reflect the culture of the Corinthians or the Ephesians to which the book of Timothy was written. And therefore, that argument doesn't work either.

Another view is that Paul didn't really write these passages. Now, to me this is typical of liberals. I mean, liberals have for a long time been chopping and dicing up the scriptures and deciding how much of Isaiah Isaiah really got to write and whether Moses ever wrote any of the Pentateuch.

And there's hardly a book in the Bible they haven't tried to re-identify the authorship of. And so to say, well, this passage or that passage was an interpolation by some scribe, it never was in the original and so forth, is a very common thing for liberals to do. It's interesting, however, that liberal scholars in general have not made this claim about these passages unless those scholars were themselves feminists.

In other words, there isn't some objective scholarly reason to say Paul didn't write these passages. It's just that those who are saying so don't like what Paul wrote. And since they don't think they'll make many points with the evangelical Christianity by saying we reject Paul, they just say, well, Paul didn't write this probably.

Now, on what basis do they say that? Well, I read one, he considered himself a Pentecostal scholar. Actually, Gordon Fee, he's the first Pentecostal scholar, they say. And therefore, as a Pentecostal, you'd expect him to be somewhat conservative in theology.

However, Pentecostals also make no distinctions generally between men and women in pastor roles. And so I wasn't too surprised at the approach he took. But he, as a feminist, he basically said he did not believe that Paul wrote those verses in 1 Corinthians 14 that we wrote.

Now, on what basis did he say that? Well, he tells me. He says, well, for one thing, the verses appear in different places in different manuscripts, but they appear in all the manuscripts. Those verses are put at the end of chapter 14 and a few in the Western text.

And therefore, since they're not found in the same spot in all the manuscripts, they appear, he thought, to not be original. But the other thing he said, and the principal

reason was, he said, it seems improbable that Paul would write these words. Now, this is really the reason why liberals would ever claim that Paul didn't write this or that passage.

I read something by another scholar years ago, F.F. Bruce, who is considered to be evangelical to the bone. But he hedged liberally, I think, in one case when he was talking about 1 Thessalonians 2, where Paul talked about how the Jews were the wrath of God has come upon them to the uttermost because they don't please God and they oppose all men and they don't let us preach the gospel to Gentiles that they may be saved. A very, almost anti-Semitic sounding passage.

Now, Paul couldn't be anti-Semitic because he was a Jew himself. But very hard on the Jews, the passage was. And I remember F.F. Bruce writing in a commentary on 1 Thessalonians, saying Paul probably didn't write these words because they seem so uncharacteristic of him.

I mean, once you allow that Paul didn't write such and such a thing because you think it doesn't sound characteristic of his thought, you have simply entered onto a slippery slope where Paul, the validity of his writings is subject to the judgment of your subjective opinion of what Paul probably thought or probably would write. Christians for the last 1900 years didn't have any problem believing Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians 2, and verses 13 through 15. And they didn't have any problem believing that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians chapter 14 either.

It's interesting, it's not until the things Paul wrote become politically incorrect that suddenly it seems intrinsically improbable that he would have written it. Until it was politically incorrect, it was just fine. But as soon as our own culture decides that this is not what we agree with anymore, then we try to get Paul on our side and say, well, Paul didn't seem to think, I'm sure Paul didn't really think this way, he couldn't have written this line.

And by the way, the passage in 1 Timothy is part of what we call the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, and liberals have for a long time been saying Paul didn't write those, though the early church believed he did, and I do too, because whoever wrote them said he was Paul. If Paul didn't write those, someone else by the same name did, who traveled with Timothy and Silas. It could have been many of those.

There is one other approach that liberals have taken, or feminists have taken, to get rid of these passages and their impact, and that is to say, we've misunderstood what these things are saying. Now, that hasn't been the case in all of the passages, but in 1 Corinthians 14, if you'll turn there with me again, I'd like to show you what they have done. You'll find that some of the more modern translations of the Bible have actually done this, reflecting the liberal feminist leanings of the translators.

1 Corinthians 14, back to that passage, verses 34 through... well, we don't have to read the whole passage again, but when it says, let your women keep silent in the churches, beginning with that sentence, some feminist authors have written that Paul isn't here stating his view, he's stating the view of an imagined objector. Now, we know that in Romans, and even in 1 Corinthians, on occasions, Paul does anticipate an objection from one of his readers. Romans, this happens a lot, he says, someone will say then, let us do evil that good may result.

Or, you will say then, how does God find fault for who has resisted His will? Paul is continually aware how his readers might take something he has said, misunderstand it, and come up with such and such an objection, and then Paul gives the objection, and then he answers it. And they think, or at least they claim, I don't know if they really think this honestly, because it's not realistic, but they claim that Paul is doing that here. That with the beginning of verse 34, we should put quotation marks, and some modern translations have done this for us, that it is not Paul speaking, but some objector that he imagines will be speaking in verse 34.

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive, as the law also says, and if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for the women to speak in the church. Unquote. Now, that is supposedly the entire thing, the entire objectionable passage, in other words, is said to be not Paul's opinion at all.

We've misunderstood Paul in thinking that he was saying that. He's just really quoting an imaginary objector. And now he answers the objection in verse 36, where he says, or did the word of God come originally from you, or was it only you that it reached? Now, the word you there in both places is in the plural masculine.

So, they say, well, what he's saying is, that's obviously a man raising this objection, that he's quoting in verses 34 and 35, and he's saying, you men, does the word only come to you men? Has it only reached you men? And so, that's their argument. However, the argument is 100% made up of whole cloth. It doesn't have anything textually in its favor.

It doesn't even look like any of the passages where Paul raised objections, even Gordon Fee, the feminist, when he was dealing with this, he raised the point that some people say that, he says, it's not likely to be true. He said that you never find another case where Paul is raising an objection that he anticipates and goes so long with so much argumentation within the objection. Usually, it's a short sentence that someone will give, and then he'll answer it plainly.

Here, there's nothing like someone will say, or you may say, as Paul often introduces these objections, that kind of thing, and, I mean, it's just too long. It's like a paragraph. Furthermore, there's nothing about it that would suggest it, and it's not the kind of objection that a person would raise to what Paul has just said previously.

See, that's an important point. When Paul does give an objector's position and argues it, he's always suggesting an objection that someone will raise to what he has just said. Here, there's nothing that he has just said that would cause the objection, let the woman keep silent.

What has he just said? He said the spirit of a prophet. He's talking about prophecy and tongues and that kind of stuff. There's not a word about women previous to this.

And he says, for God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. This is not the kind of context where an objector would pipe in, ah, yeah, but what about those women? Let them keep silent in the church. There's absolutely nothing, nothing at all to commend this particular argument of the feminists against this passage.

So the feminists sometimes say, A, Paul was guided by his own prejudice against women, or B, he was condescending to the prejudices of the society that the churches were in, didn't want the churches to offend the cultures, or they claim Paul didn't write these passages, or they claim that we're not really understanding what Paul was saying, and that he really wouldn't have said that. But all of this is just so much nonsense. And I say that not in a bigoted way against it.

I mean, I am bigoted against, I guess, liberal feminism when it comes to the church. But, I mean, as an objective reasoning person, I say it's nonsense. There's really not one thing in favor of any of these objections.

And it's interesting that these particular explanations never arose in the church until Paul's teaching became unsavory in the culture, the worldly culture. It's very clear when you read feminist arguments that they are following the worldly culture, as the church so typically does, on many issues. And this women's issue is one where the church, to a large degree, has followed the secular culture.

Paul, however, is not so easily dispensed with. And those who believe that Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, and that God preserved his word in the writings of Paul, as well as the other New Testament writers, and Old Testament writers too, simply have to look at these scriptures and say, what is God saying here? This is the word of God. God is telling us something.

What is it he's telling us? And that, of course, puts upon us the requirement that we look at them very carefully and see if we can understand what's being said without imposing an agenda. Now, let me just say this. I've made it very clear.

I'm not only not a feminist, I'm anti-feminist. Anyone who is pro-feminist might say, well, Steve, you've got an agenda. You've got a patriarchal agenda.

You've got a male dominance agenda. You've already said you're against feminism. That

means you're for hierarchy.

That means you're in favor of men ruling over women. Let me just say this. You don't have to believe me, but I'll tell you the truth.

If I believe in male authority in the church and in the home, it is not because of my instincts. It is not because of my preferences. It is because I've been convinced by the word of God that there is no escape from this position.

My own instincts and my own preferences actually would be the other direction. I, as a teacher, would much rather say things that people like to hear. And since at least half, if not more than half of the congregation are women, I'd like to be popular with the congregation.

I mean, I don't have anything to gain by advocating male authority, because that sticks me in a role of authority. I don't like to be in roles of authority, because there's responsibility there. I just assumed God had given to somebody else, but he didn't.

The position I take, my conscience is bound to the word of God. If I could make it say something else in good conscience, I would gladly do so. Now, you don't have to agree with me on that.

You don't even have to believe I'm being honest when I say that, but I am being honest. That's my position. I'd be pleased as punch to be able to get up here and find the scripture saying the opposite of that, if that would make everyone more happy.

But making people happy is not the task of a minister of the gospel or of a Bible teacher. I didn't write the Bible. If I had, I might have written it differently, but I wouldn't have been inspired then.

But I'm not a writer of scripture, I'm a teacher of scripture, and therefore it is incumbent on me to teach what it says, and not to innovate, and not to twist it. It is my position to fear God and to try to not pervert the scripture as some may. Now, in 1 Corinthians 11, the first passage we looked at, that's the passage, the notorious passage about head coverings.

Now, I'm sure a lot of you women look over at my wife real quickly to see if she's wearing a head covering, so you can already anticipate what I think about this. My wife is not wearing a head covering, and that's because I do not believe that this passage imposes that on us. However, as an evangelical who believes in the word of God being inspired, someone is entitled to say, why? Why not, Steve? Doesn't the passage as clearly teach that women should wear head coverings when they pray and prophesy, as it teaches anything in the whole Bible? What could be clearer than this teaching? Well, here we have to use reason in approaching scripture to a certain extent.

I think we should always use reason. God gave it to us for that reason. Now, I don't believe, that was not meant to be a play on words, but that is why God gave us the reasoning power.

Now, there is a disclaimer at the end of the passage in verse 16. The meaning of that disclaimer has been greatly disputed. I have sought to understand it, not according to what I prefer, because frankly, I wouldn't mind if women wore head coverings.

I wouldn't mind if women dressed in this country the way that Muslim women dress. Not that I wish it on them, but it wouldn't affect me, except I'd be subject to much less temptation than I am in this present culture. I wouldn't mind that at all.

But I wouldn't wish to impose that. I'm just saying, whatever God says is fine with me. I don't have an axe to grind here.

But the disclaimer at the end of the passage in 1 Corinthians 11 that we read says, but if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. Now, whatever Paul is teaching in verses 2 through 15 is summarized with this statement. If anyone is contentious about this, if someone really doesn't like this, if someone really wants to argue about this, he says, here is the solution, here is how I would diffuse the dispute over it.

We have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. Now, what does that mean? Interestingly, there are some translations of the Bible that are willing to just turn that verse on its head for some reason. I can't see what they gain by doing so.

But the NIV, for example, translates this verse, we have no other custom, nor do the churches of God. Now, that's a very strange change, because this says we have no such custom. The NIV says we have no other custom, just the opposite.

It makes the statement mean the exact opposite of what Paul wrote. And you can look in the Greek if you want, it's available. In the Greek, Paul said, we have no such custom.

If the NIV reading were taken, which is a total innovation of the translators, not based on anything in the Greek, we have no other custom, then Paul would be saying, listen, anyone who wants to be contentious, sit down and shut up, we've got this universal custom through all the churches of God. We've got no other custom in any churches. Who are you to pipe up and be different? But he didn't say we have no other custom, he said we have no such custom.

What custom? What such custom? Presumably he's talking about some custom that he's been referring to. What custom is that? Well, there are people who believe that women today should be veiled and should cover themselves, and again, I'm not opposed to it, I just don't think that they're understanding the Scripture as well as they could. I personally believe that the custom he's referring to is the custom he's been discussing.

That is the custom that women ought to wear head coverings when they pray and prostrate, and that men should not. That women should have long hair and men should have short hair. Those are the customs he's been talking about throughout the whole passage.

And he says, at the end of it, if anyone's really bothered by this, everyone's to fight about it, listen, we don't have any such custom. Who are we then? Who's we that we don't have? Nor do the churches of God. Paul means him and his companion, and many of the other churches don't have that custom.

Now, some would say, especially those who think that women ought still to wear head coverings in the church, some would say that the custom Paul says that we don't have, nor the churches of God, is the custom of contending. He says, if anyone seems contentious, we have no such custom. That is, if anyone seems to want to contend with the dictates of an apostle, that custom of contending with apostles, we don't have that custom around here.

I don't think that's likely. For one thing, contending is not a custom. The word custom that he uses is a received and agreed upon social practice.

And if there's been any social practice he's been discussing, in the passage it's the women wearing the head coverings and the men not. The women having the long hair and the men having the short hair. Now, what he's saying is, these customs which I'm urging upon you, do not prevail throughout the entire empire, nor even with ourselves.

Now, I'll give you an example of this. The customs that Paul has argued for, as we said, women's head coverings, yes, men's head coverings, no. Now, the head covering can be either a veil, presumably, or hair.

So, a man should not wear a veil and he should not have long hair. A woman, on the other hand, should have both, a veil and long hair. That's the custom he's talking about.

Did Paul observe that custom? He did not. You can read it yourself, in the book of Acts, chapter 18, when Paul left Corinth after being there, he was in Corinth for 18 months. And the Bible says, when he left Corinth, he shaved his head at St. Shreya, because he had a veil.

Now, I don't know if you're familiar with the Jewish customs. We preached some time ago about the Nazarite veil, that's what he's referring to. There's only one Jewish veil where a man shaves his head.

A man takes a vow for a period of time. He grows his hair, his beard, all his hair, body hair, no razor touches him at all. And then, at the end of the vow, he shaves his head and burns the hair as an offering to God.

That's the Nazarite veil, according to Numbers, chapter 6. It's the veil Paul took. Interestingly, when Paul left Corinth, he shaved his head, because he had the veil. Now, he was finishing up the Nazarite veil.

That means he must have been growing his hair long while he was in Corinth, at least for part of that time. He was there 18 months. Now, here he's arguing that the Corinthians, the men, ought not to have long hair, but he grew his hair long while he was there.

Now, likewise, he argues it's a shame for a woman to have her head shorn, shaved. And yet, the same passage in Numbers 6 says that if a man or a woman takes the vow of Nazarite, she shaves her head too at the end of it. It's not a shame in the Jewish law.

It's not a shame in Jewish culture. Queen Berenice, the wife of Agrippa II, took a Nazarite vow, and she shaved her head, Josephus tells us. That a man might have his hair long, or a woman have her hair shorn, in the Jewish culture, was not a shame.

It was usually part of indication that they had a vow of separation to God. In the Greek culture, however, that was different. Greek culture didn't have that, and the Corinthians were Greeks in a Greek culture.

The Romans also seemed to have a different custom than this, because when Paul wrote to the Roman culture in Ephesus, when he wrote 1 Timothy 2, he talked to the women about their attire. He talked about women wearing modest attire. He talked about them not having elaborate hairdos and so forth.

Interestingly, he assumed their hair would be visible, not covered, because he told them not to have their hair braided and full of gold and silver and all kinds of stuff like that, because then the Roman women didn't cover their head. The Roman women had these elaborate hairdos, so he told the Christian women there not to follow that custom, because it was gaudy and because it was immodest. But interestingly, the Roman women didn't seem to cover their heads, and Paul didn't mention the need to cover the head when he addressed the women's attire, what was proper for the women, when he wrote to the Roman culture in 1 Timothy, when he wrote to Ephesus.

So, when Paul says, we have no such custom, neither do the churches of God, I believe he's saying, well, I think he's saying what sounds like the most obvious meaning. The customs I'm laying out for you Greek Christians here are not universal customs in all the churches. Even I, Paul, don't follow them, because I'm a Jew and I take the Nazarite vow once in a while.

I grow my hair out long sometimes. Jewish men covered their heads, you know, to pray. Greek men did not.

So, I mean, I won't fight about this, but I mean, there's a lot of people who have written whole book-length treatments about how women ought to be wearing veils nowadays,

and as far as I'm concerned, if every woman in the church wore a veil, it would please me fine. But I can't see any biblical reason to impose it or to say that it has to be done. I find Paul himself telling us that this is a custom that is not universal.

Now, I realize that many of the things Paul said we should do or Jesus said we do, some people say, well, that was just a custom of the times. And by saying that, they evaporate all the authority out of something the Bible says by just saying, well, that was for the culture of that time. We can't do that just, you know, whenever we want to do that.

But when Paul himself tells us this is a custom in your area, it's not a custom everywhere. It's not something that's worth fighting about or contending about. If someone wants to contend about it, don't bother.

It's not that important. Now, Paul tells us that, and that's what I understand him to say. Then I say we have to take him at his word.

That's not a universal thing. What is a universal thing in the passage is that the head of every man is Christ, the head of Christ is God, and the head of the woman is the man. That's universal.

And, of course, the wearing of head coverings in Greece was the way the women demonstrated that they accepted their position as wives in subordination to their husbands. For the Christian women in that culture to stop wearing head coverings would be for them to advertise, whether rightly or not, truthfully or not, they'd be advertising to the culture that Christian women don't believe in submission to the husband. And Paul knew that they better believe in that because that's something God established.

And so he didn't want women making that statement. That's at least what I understand in this passage. I won't go into the rest of it in detail, although I do have tapes, I think, two, I think three hours talking about 1 Corinthians 11 if you want a verse-by-verse treatment.

But that's as far as what 1 Corinthians 11 is talking about. It seems to be saying, as he begins his comments in verse 3, the head of the wife is the husband, and in the church it is shameful for a woman to advertise otherwise. In that culture, for a woman not to have head covering was to advertise that she's not subject to her husband's headship.

That would be a shame for a man to wear a head covering or his hair long to be, to take on what would be in that culture an effeminate style. That would be a shame also, an abomination. So that is what Paul is saying there.

I don't think that passage imposes the head covering on modern Christian women in all cultures, although in some cultures, if that's what they do, I would recommend it. Now the other passages, I'd like to skip over 1 Corinthians 14 first. I'll tell you what, I'm going to talk about those passages separately a little later.

Because the other two passages, 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, are the ones that mention, let your women keep silent in the churches. And that is really, that's really the hard thing to work with in those passages, is women keeping silent. I'd say that's the thing I find hard to work with.

Some women find other things in the passage hard to work with too. But that's the thing I find difficult. I want to give those some close attention.

But I want to cover a few preliminary points first, if I could. First of all, I want to say that there are those who, because of passages like this, have concluded that the Bible teaches the inferiority of women to men. And that Paul forbids them to speak and forbids them to be leaders in the church just because of the assumption that in some sense or another, women are inferior to men.

I don't believe that the Bible teaches that women are inferior to men. I don't think that that is Paul's reasoning. I think there's a different reason that he gives.

But because this is commonly thought, I just thought I might address it. There are three different angles to this theory that women are inferior to men that I've heard. The Bible itself says women are the weaker vessel.

There's no disputing that the Bible says that. In 1 Timothy 3, 7, it says that women are the weaker vessel. And therefore, of course, that would suggest their inferiority.

Well, I'm not sure in what sense he means weaker. I think most women are physically weaker than most men. And there may be other areas that Peter has in mind of their weakness.

I don't know. Maybe because women often are more emotional than men. I don't know.

Maybe they're more susceptible to emotional weakness. I don't know. I'm not sure exactly in what sense.

I can think of several senses that women might be indeed weaker than men. But that would not speak of inferiority to a biblical mindset. Because even the one passage that speaks to them as weaker vessels specifically says that they are to be honored because they are weaker vessels.

It is a position of honor to be weak in Scripture. You see, God's values are all upside down in the world. The strong exploit the weak in the world.

And the weak are exploited because they're inferior. At least they're viewed as such. And that's how the strong justify the exploitation of the weak.

In the body of Christ, it's the other way around. Peter says husbands dwell with them according to knowledge giving honor unto the wife as the weaker vessel. Giving honor to

the wife as the weaker vessel and as the heirs together of the grace of life.

Now, whatever is meant by the grace of life probably a reference to just eternal life it is something in which the wife is equal to her husband. They are heirs together of the grace of life. Peter is there arguing for the equality of women at least in terms of salvation and so forth and that although they are weaker, they are to be honored because they're weaker.

Paul says that himself. Peter said it in 1 Peter 3.7. Paul said it also in a different way. Not talking about women, but talking about weakness in general.

In 1 Corinthians 12, verses 22 and 23 he's talking about the different gifts that different members of the body of Christ have and he compares it with different members of the physical body of the human body and he says in 1 Corinthians 12, 22 and 23 No, much rather those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary and those members of the body which we think to be less honorable on these we bestow the greater honor and our unpresentable parts have the greater modesty. Now he's talking of course about the analogy of a physical body and applying it to the church but he's saying there are parts of our body that are more delicate there are also in some cases parts of our body that modesty requires us to cover and to protect and he says we in a sense bestow a greater honor upon these because we protect them more closely we cover them it is in a sense they are not cheapened by being exposed to the public like some parts of our bodies are our hands, our faces and so forth there are parts of our body that we are more modest about and we protect them more because they are the weaker they are the less presentable now less presentable doesn't mean shameful the parts of your body that are less presentable due to modesty are not shameful parts of the body God knows, the culture practically worships them they are hidden because they are so sacred they are too sacred to be treated as common and paraded before the public and so Paul is arguing that being weak a weaker member of the body doesn't mean you are less honorable maybe the world thinks of it as less honorable but it is actually that which is fragile that which is sacred that which is weak that which needs to be handled with care in a sense we treat those things with more honor you treat a china cup with greater honor in a sense than a lug wrench because you treat it kindly you treat it delicately and so forth and that is not an inferior thing weakness certainly exists and comparative weakness exists between different parties in the body of Christ but honor and inferiority and those kind of things are not related to the subject of weakness another part of the theory of the inferiority of women or another aspect of it is the idea that the woman was deceived Paul says in 1st Timothy 2 says the woman was deceived and was in the transgression and therefore it is argued that Paul is saying that women are more subject to deception more vulnerable to be deceived more likely to be deceived than men and therefore they should not teach or have authority over men this is all part of some people's understanding of 1st Timothy 2 because Paul says I don't let a woman have authority or teach over men because the man was first formed then the

woman and the woman was deceived now the statement that the woman was deceived is simply correct it was true he is not talking about any woman in the 20th century or even any woman in history he is talking about Eve in the garden he is talking about a historical fact he is not necessarily making a statement about women in general now I will admit that Paul's mention of the woman being deceived could I mean one possibility is that he is saying that in order to convey the notion that women in general might be more vulnerable to deception and that might even be true at times but I don't think that is what was in Paul's mind because Paul allowed women to do things that he would not risk if he was afraid they were likely to be deceived more than men for instance he let them teach children he let older women teach younger women now children are some of the most vulnerable persons to be taught in the church and to let the women teach them would not be very wise if women are more prone to deception who knows what they will be teaching these kids actually I have observed that a great number of women have been very gullible and have fallen to deception and most cults or a great number of the cults I should say not most but a great number of cults are started by women and run by women but what amazes me even more is how many men follow them it seems to me that if it is true and I am not sure that it is but if it is true that more women fall into deception than men do the percentages are not remarkably disparate I really think that men seem to be as easily deceived as women in different areas women may be more susceptible to one kind of deception that appeals to a certain aspect of their personality men tend to be deceived about things that appeal to something in them I think men and women are about equally deceived and I don't know that Paul is trying to tell us that he doesn't let women teach because they are likely to be deceived he does mention as a point of historical fact in the Garden of Eden the woman was deceived but he doesn't apply that to anything as a rationale for now we can't trust women because they will all be deceived we know very well that Paul was aware of many women who were not deceived and who were friends of his and he had a high regard for one other aspect of this idea that women are inferior that is I think wrong is that women are less intelligent than men now one angle of this was that Paul didn't the argument is that Paul didn't let women teach in the church because they didn't have the education women weren't educated in those days and men were and therefore of course women should not be allowed to teach or have authority over men because the women didn't have the education the men did but now of course women go to seminary and Bible school and have all the resources men do and so we shouldn't listen to what Paul said now because women are as educated as men are now well I don't think Paul had any kind of interest in how educated a person was Jesus didn't have much formal education neither did Peter or James or John and in church history formal education has never really had much to do with a person being a good preacher C.H. Spurgeon never went to college prince of all preachers he is sometimes called A.W. Tozer one of my personal favorites never had more than an 8th grade education and I just have never felt that there is anything in the Bible that would encourage us to think that education had anything to do with qualifying a person to preach and therefore the fact that women in those days didn't have the

same educational advantages as men did and therefore Paul wouldn't let them preach I just don't see it as having any that is an argument raised by people in seminaries who think in terms of theological training qualifying someone to be a minister I don't think there were theological seminaries when Paul wrote that I don't think men had theological training either there was no formal training available to them so the idea that women are less intelligent or less educated and therefore inferior I don't think is biblical frankly it is interesting to me that when in the Old Testament Proverbs wanted to personify wisdom it was the Holy Spirit's decision to choose a feminine personification wisdom is always personified as a woman and the virtuous woman is described in Proverbs 31 in verse 29 as having the words of wisdom proceed from her mouth and the law of kindness is on her tongue Solomon didn't believe that women were incapable of being as wise as men I mean look at the Old Testament who was wiser Nabal or Abigail his wife Nabal his very name means fool and he showed himself to be a great fool his wife on the other hand is described as a wise woman it's clear that some women are not as intelligent as some men but so what? some men are not as intelligent as some women that's irrelevant you don't make divisions between men and women in terms of what they can offer to God on the basis of the whole gender is considered less intelligent than this other gender that's not the way Paul thought that's not the way the Bible teaches I don't think and I think it's wrong to argue that women are inferior to men in any of these ways they are in general weaker vessels but the Bible doesn't consider that inferior and people who do might as well just say after me I do not believe the Bible if you say people who are weaker are inferior then you're just telling me you don't believe the Bible because the Bible doesn't say that weakness is an inferiority thing in many cases it's more honorable God has chosen the weak things to confound the strong and the foolish things to confound the wise so if it were true that women are either more foolish or weaker than men that would not even argue for their inferiority at all now on the other hand the Bible does teach that women are subordinate to men or more properly wives are subordinate to husbands that's really what the Bible teaches the Bible doesn't really teach that all women are subordinate to all men it just teaches that in the relationship between the husband and wife in general the man is the leader he is the one who stands in the analogy of Christ to the church and the woman stands as the church in that analogy and it would be quite wrong to turn that on its head as our culture would like to do but subordination does not mean inferiority let me tell you what the Bible does teach I believe first of all God has established hierarchy in human relationships hierarchy means some people are in authority over other people and some are subordinate under others God has established hierarchy in human relationships out of his concern for orderliness in this universe and in human society that's why we see for example that God has ordained that children are subject to their parents and he commands servants to be subject to their masters and subjects to their kings and wives to their husbands these are all parts of God's expressed concern for order for orderliness and many times they have other value as well now Jesus' commitment to this orderliness is seen for example when he was a child it tells us in Luke chapter 2 that Jesus went home at age 12 again when his parents found him

after having lost track of him they found him in the temple in Jerusalem when they found him he went home with them and it says this in Luke chapter 2 verse 51 then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was subject to them now Jesus was subject to them we didn't have to be told that except that maybe we did need to be told that Jesus was definitely the intellectual superior to Mary and Joseph in fact the last thing we read about them is that when he said did you not know I must be about my father's business it says they did not understand the statement which he spoke they weren't real bright apparently I understand it I mean I must be about my father's business that's not too hard to understand but they didn't understand it they weren't exactly spiritually perceptive they were peasants Jesus was the son of God now if anyone could have argued this subordination business is for the birds you know because I'm superior Jesus could have argued that way about his parents but he did not he went down and he was subject to them why? because it is God's command Jesus was not inferior to them he was subordinate because in God's hierarchy children are subordinate to their parents that same hierarchy we read the husband is the head of the wife and so the wife is subject or subordinate to her husband it is not the place of any man or woman to dictate what position they will hold in God's kingdom when you come to Christ you surrender your rights to your life and to whatever else you had you come with no agendas you are bought with a price you are owned and he can position you like the piece in the puzzle that he wants you in if you don't like the position you can always apostatize and go to hell if you want but the fact is most of us don't want that option we want to be saved but sometimes we want to also be our own master that's not possible it's not possible to be saved and be your own master you don't choose what position you are in in God's kingdom he does and you accept it happily if you are going to be a Christian in 1 Corinthians 12.18 Paul said but now God has set the members each of them in the body as he pleased now he is talking about different gifts but that's true of all the members of the body male, female, children, whatever whatever position he has put you in he has put you there because it pleased him and his pleasure is what you are supposed to be concerned with not your own I think of Mary when she was told that she was going to have a baby and although it was a great privilege of course to be told that she is the mother of the Messiah it also was going to affect a great deal probably as far as she knew she would not be believed by anybody and so it was going to ruin her reputation and so forth but we all I think remember her response was very commendable when she heard the news and that response was that which we find in Luke chapter 1 verse 38 Mary said behold the maid servant of the Lord let it be to me according to your word she was given some news that was both good and difficult but she said I'm the handmaiden that means I'm the slave girl behold I'm the slave girl of the Lord let it be to me not according to my preferences but according to your word whatever you say I'm the Lord's slave whatever he says that's all I want to know I've sometimes wondered and I try to be as honest with myself as I can because I don't see any value in fooling myself I've wondered if I were not a man would I see these passages the same way if I were not a man would I have the same doctrine on this as I have as a man and my answer is I've

asked myself many times I've tried to look at it very objectively and I think I don't see how I could not because I know that if I were a woman but had the same Christianity as I have now as a man my one concern would be not how can I get the most for myself out of this Christian life or how can I get to heaven and still get my way too as a man my concern is this is there any word from God about what he wants me to do because that's what I want to do I want to do whatever he wants me to do I just want to know if there's anything clearly stated that he wants me to do just tell me what it is and I think if you change my gender magically and I was now a woman with the same Christianity I'd have the same attitude I don't care what God says I'm the handmaiden of the Lord be unto me according to his word just tell me what the word says I just want to know God's word because I'm his follower I'm his servant I'm his slave and so was Mary we don't decide for ourselves what we should be and no man decides it for us either God does and if we're Christians we rejoice in it when Pope John Paul visited America back in 1980 he was greeted by a bunch of angry American women who were accusing him of depriving them of their rights because he maintains the policy that women should not be ordained according to the Catholic priesthood the Pope apparently was I wouldn't be surprised if he was anticipating this he kept his cool very well he was very serene in the whole thing but he answered very wisely it seems to me and I'm no fan of the Pope but he gave a right answer he said to the women that were complaining about it he said the ordination of women is not a question of human rights it's a question of the will of God he put it right in his perspective I mean think of those women who are saying hey Pope you're unfair because you won't ordain us women can you imagine if those women were ordained in the Catholic Church when they have so low a view of the Pope I mean honestly I don't have a high view of the Pope myself but I'm not seeking to be a minister in a Catholic Church either as Catholics they're supposedly believers in the infallibility of the Pope but they seem to have forgotten that they want to be in the ministry of the Catholic Church but they don't want to be real Catholics and there's a lot of evangelicals like that too they want to be viewed as evangelicals but they don't really want to be biblical although evangelicals claim to follow the Bible they don't want to follow the Bible when it isn't pleasing to them they don't want to die to themselves and do the right thing in some cases there's actually a letter in Time Magazine that a woman wrote after the Pope's visit and the woman who wrote that letter to Time wrote this quote the Pope's reaffirmation of the ban against the ordination of women was of course a slap in the face to all women it was also however an offense to God because it attributes to Him a prejudice which by definition He cannot have God gave women equal minds and hearts and equal capacity to love and serve Him that sounds very reasonable doesn't it problem is is it a slap in the face of God and of women to say it's not a matter of human rights it's a matter of the will of God if God said something and we affirm it is that a slap in the face of women only women who want to rebel against God is it a slap in the face of men yeah the same men the ones who want to rebel against God to reaffirm what God said is always a slap in the face of those who want to rebel against Him but to those who want to submit to God it's not now she said in her letter to Time it was interesting she says it's

an offense to God because it attributes to Him a prejudice which by definition He cannot have who's making the definitions up here by definition God is a being who cannot have any prejudices that's what she's saying by definition He can't have a prejudice well I don't think I don't know whether God has prejudices or not I really don't know but I would say this I don't think there's any objective definition of God out there except the one this woman made up that says God is a being who by definition can't have prejudices God can do whatever He wants to do that's a better definition of God a being who can do whatever He wants to do and say whatever He wants to say and no one has any right to tell Him He should do it different that's what God is He's not a God who by definition has no prejudices and then when she says this and this is very important because it's quite true what she says but her implications are mistaken she says quite correctly God gave women equal minds and hearts and an equal capacity to love and serve Him and that's true as near as I can tell I mean not all women are equal to all men and not all men are it's an individual thing but in terms of whole categories yes, women are as intelligent as men as near as I can tell as they have feelings as much as men and they have the capacity to love and serve God but that's irrelevant the question is not what did God give them the question is what did God tell them to do with it many times people think that just because they have the capacity to do something that should open any door for them that they want and do anything they want with it no, if God has also given instructions along with the gift you know, you get the gift and it's an interesting thing you're not sure quite what to do with it until you read the instructions and God has given women and men the gift of rationality the gift of spirituality the gift of various gifts of the Spirit and He also gives the instructions with the gift and it makes no sense to just say well, God gave me the same gift He gave you therefore, I know I should do everything you do not necessarily anything about it in the instructions that's the important thing because God has the right to give the instructions now, the problem this woman has in her thinking is that which almost every unthinking person has and that is the assumption that if God made women equal to men in mental and spiritual capacity as seems to be true then that argues for interchangeability if she has the same intellectual powers I have then she should do everything I do if I have all the same spiritual things she has then I should do everything she does well, it's not true things that are equal are not always interchangeable there are many parts of your body that are of equal value to you as each other but they're not interchangeable parts they have unique functions your heart and your brain for example are both equally valuable to you but they're not interchangeable they have different functions and we don't have to read the Bible to find out what those are they do that naturally but we know they're equal in value and we know they're not interchangeable there are parts of a machine of a car that may be of equal value to each other but they're not interchangeable the transmission in some part of the component of the engine might be of equal value but they're not interchangeable parts and men and women may indeed be equal in value but not be interchangeable if God has said ok, I made the man to do this I made the woman to do that that doesn't mean that one is inferior to the other or of less value it was Paul who said in Galatians

3.28 that there's no Jew or Gentile male or female bond or free in Christ he's certainly claiming there's an equality in God an equality of access to God an equality in salvation an equality of value to God but equality is not the same thing as addressing function I have a computer that's worth a certain amount of money I have a car that's worth about the same amount of money but they don't do the same thing they're not designed to do the same thing and I don't want them to do the same thing but in saying that I'm not saying that one is inferior to the other they're just different and man has made woman I mean God has made woman and man different they are different in some things and they have different callings and God has not been secretive about what those differences are in their callings I'm going to skip over a few points I wanted to make because of the shortage of time let's talk about this general subordination of the wife to the husband with reference to its relevance to the woman functioning in the church first of all what is meant by in the church as we've said in this series all along the church is really just the family of God but the term church is used in a variety of ways in scripture it's used to speak of the whole universal body of Christ worldwide it is sometimes used to speak of all the Christians in a given city or locality and it is sometimes used to speak of particular gatherings of Christians in certain homes and other places it seems clear that when Paul is addressing what a woman ought to do in the church he's talking in this third sense he's not talking about as members of the global body of Christ he's talking about their functioning when the churches are gathering when he uses the term in the church he's talking about Christians gathering formally for whatever it is they gather for worship or teaching or ministry or whatever when the church gathers formally as opposed to just living as the church in the world in 1 Corinthians 11, 18 Paul says this for first of all when you come together as a church I hear there are divisions among you now notice when you come together as a church that I think is a good definition of what he means by in the church when the church has come together as a gathering of the church in 1 Corinthians 14, 19 Paul says yet in the church I'd rather speak five words with my understanding that I might teach others also than ten thousand words in a tongue now he said I speak in tongues more than you all but in the church, no I don't do that as much I don't do that at all I'd rather speak words intelligible in the church because obviously the church is a place where people are gathered to edify one another and it's not the same thing as outside the church in 1 Corinthians 14, 28 14, 28 of 1 Corinthians Paul says but if there's no interpreter let him keep silent in the church by the way, this statement keep silent in the church is exactly the same phrase as is applied to women later on in verse 34 let your women keep silent in the church same words here it's applied to men in certain circumstances now, in the church he's talking about now what does Paul have in mind when he's talking about in the church well in 1 Corinthians 14, 23 I think we have the best answer to that question now, 1 Corinthians 14 is that chapter it talks about the women being silent in the church and in that chapter, verse 23 he defines what it means in the church 1 Corinthians 14, 23 says therefore, if the whole church comes together in one place now, that's what he's thinking of as in the church that's when the whole church comes together in one place or at least you know maybe

not every member is there maybe some are sick or something or some are out of town but the idea is it's a general gathering of all the Christians in the town or in the fellowship whatever so, that is there were apparently as soon as we get time from the whole church gathered together in one place and those were the church meetings in which he said the women should be silent but the next question has we'll have to deal with this what does it mean to be silent there's quite a few things I'd like to say more that I need to skip over quite rapidly but we do find Paul saying that he does not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man now, he does not in other words allow a woman in the position of an elder that is in fact what the context is talking about because his statement that he does not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man is immediately preceding his qualifications for elder he says if a man wants to be an elder he has to be apt to teach, for example and he has to be the husband of one wife obviously a male so Paul is talking about eldership roles and he does withhold that from women he doesn't put women there now, why? well, he doesn't necessarily tell us why except that in all the places that we read 1 Corinthians 11 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 Paul alludes to something in the Old Testament in each case he's alluding to the Garden of Eden and he indicates that God's reasons or Paul's reasons or both for having women do something different than men in the church has to do with something that happened in the Garden of Eden in 1 Timothy he says because the man was first formed then the woman and the woman was deceived and the man was not deceived but the point is that man was formed first that's the reason he gives has nothing to do with the culture of the people in Ephesus he's not accommodating the culture he's talking about something that happened way back before there was an Ephesus back in the Garden of Eden likewise in 1 Corinthians 11 that business about the woman being subject to the husband and so forth is all about what woman was made for the man not the man made for the woman and so forth he's talking about creation even the passage in 1 Corinthians 14 that says women are to be in subordination under their husbands as also says the law there's really no place in the law that says that except Genesis 3.16 that says to the woman your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you so all of the passages in question appeal back to the Garden of Eden to the creation order and to the fall and the consequences of the fall all of those things are unchangeable things no amount of change in our culture is ever going to bring any change in that history and that is the basis for it what Paul apparently says there is a demonstration of God's order in creation and that the church should not go changing that remember when Jesus was asked in Matthew 19 about divorce he said well have you not read that in the beginning God made them male and female and so forth and said the two should become one flesh what he is saying is if you want to know the way God really wants things you can look at the way he made things before we filed them up before the fall God made things the way he wanted them when he made them he said it's very good and so Paul appeals back as Jesus did to those issues of how God made things and the order he made them in and what he made them for and they provide the basis for his instructions now it's interesting that Jesus although in his ministry he

exhibited a very high degree of respect for women that was uncharacteristic of his age most rabbis wouldn't speak to any woman in public including their wife and Jesus' disciples were scandalized when they came to the well at Samaria where Jesus was talking to a woman they marveled that he talked to a woman men just didn't do that in public Jesus didn't care Jesus spoke highly of women he sent women out to preach the gospel when he rose from the dead he told the women go tell my disciples I've risen from the dead that's preaching the gospel isn't it I mean Jesus Jesus had a high regard for women he spoke more highly of Mary and Bethany than he spoke of any of his disciples but in spite of Jesus' uncharacteristic high view of women he didn't appoint any of them to be apostles when he appointed 12 apostles and there were plenty of women around him good ones, good women but he didn't appoint any of them there were 12 positions available if Jesus was as we say gender blind and paid no attention to gender issues and just appointed people on the basis of their spirituality or whatever at least a few of those positions should have been held by women certainly but it's clear that Jesus appointed 12 positions men in every position no women now was Jesus didn't he like women or something that's obviously not the case some people say well he didn't do it because in the Jewish culture they wouldn't have liked that Jesus didn't care what the Jewish culture liked they didn't like him healing on the Sabbath either but he did it they didn't like him saying he was God but he did it anyway he didn't care who he offended in the Jewish culture he's going to set up his church for all eternity with the 12 foundation stones and he's going to not put in the people he wants because the Jewish culture might be offended the Jewish culture was on its way out at the time he lived there it only lasted 40 more years now Jesus picked the men that he prayed about all night long and he appointed them the next morning because God showed him who to appoint and God didn't care about the Jewish culture you know Jesus put only men in those positions although he had no low regard at all for women why? we do not know but let me give you some possible reasons that are based on biblical ideas I can't give you all the scriptures that I based them on but you may recognize some of them without my guidance one reason that God did not put women in leadership in the apostolate or in the churches may have been that this would involve the woman in the exercise of authority in some cases over her own husband and certainly over the husbands of other women that the woman who is supposed to be demonstrating her subordination to her husband if she was a leader, an apostle an elder in the church and her husband was not she'd be in authority over him in that sphere and supposedly in the other role at home that might be one reason another reason might be that the church is organized as a model of the family the church is a brotherhood we're all under one father and the family is a patriarchal by God's design, patriarchal unit the husband is the head of the wife this illustrates the relationship of Jesus and the church that's not negotiable that's not you can't tamper with that without damaging it and as the church is simply an extrapolation of the household, of the home so, for the men to be in the leadership of the church may well have served to confirm the idea of the patriarchy of the home another reason may have been that women seem to have an observed inclination to volunteer for church

work whereas men seem to have a natural reticence now this may be a little subjective but anyone who's been in the church as long as I have and some of you have probably have probably observed it it's hard to get the men to come out for the prayer meetings but not the women it's hard to get the men to volunteer to teach Sunday school but the women will do it it's not hard to get the women to fill in, you know, the positions but the men, they just didn't let the women do it maybe one of the reasons God wouldn't let the women do it wouldn't let the women in the leadership is because that forces the men to do what they're supposed to do if God had not made any distinction about that who knows, we might have all women elders in the church and you might say, what's wrong with that? well, maybe nothing except that there apparently is something wrong with it it's not what God wanted God wanted the church not to be a matriarchal organization and it could easily have become that if God didn't kind of push the men out and say, you've got to do it here's another thing since it's an aspect of a woman's fallen nature to desire to take charge you might think that's a premise that you don't agree with but I believe that Genesis 3.16 suggests that we can talk about that later if you want to it is an aspect of a woman's fallen nature to want to take charge that doesn't mean every woman wants to take charge because not all women are governed by their fallen nature some women are spiritual and they have overcome that desire to take charge but it is a part of a woman's fallen nature to want to take charge and since that is the case the male leadership of the church may provide a situation allowing the woman to deny herself and subordinate her fallen proclivities to God's authority another thing that may have been God's reason or one of them was for a woman to take leadership in the assembly would draw her away from her other exalted activities and that may be the most important reason the woman has exalted activities that God has called her to taking her from those in order to make her leader of the church would be counterproductive there's a story told in Judges chapter 9 by Gideon's only surviving son after the other son has been murdered by a half-brother and he said that the trees went out looking for a king for themselves and they asked the I don't remember how it all went they asked the vine to be the king of them and the vine said I produce grapes that are pleasant to everybody why should I stop doing that to be a king to the trees what do the trees need a king for anyway I'm doing something productive now why do you want me to be your king no thank you get someone else so the trees approached this other and this other I forget all the details but there were various bushes and plants and trees that are already doing something useful and the trees came to be our king and they said why I'm already usefully employed I don't need to be the king and so finally the trees came to the thorn bush and said you be our king and the thorn bush took up the job but the thing is the parable was meant to say you know Israel doesn't need a king and anyone who would become king is someone who doesn't have something good to offer already if you already have something useful to occupy yourself why do you look for offices and positions and so forth I can't think of why any man or woman would particularly be interested in seeking a position of authority over other people if they have anything useful to do otherwise and women definitely have much useful to do now I want

to just say something about the silence of women here in these passages the passage in 1st Timothy let the women learn in silence the word silence there is I think an unfortunate translation because the word actually is different there than it is in 1st Corinthians and in 1st Timothy 2 it just means quietness the same word is used elsewhere in Paul's writings of Christians in general that they should live a quiet life and so forth in 1st Timothy 2.2 the same word is used that Christians should live a quiet life in 1st Peter 3.4 it says that women should have a meek and quiet spirit same Greek word is silent over there so it doesn't mean silent a woman doesn't have to have a meek and silent spirit and Christians don't have to live a restful and silent life but quiet not disturbing others not noisy, not boisterous the harlot in Proverbs is frequently described as clamorous and boisterous woman loud but you know both men and women who are Christians ought to be more or less quiet and unobtrusive and so forth and speak only when they need to speak and Paul was telling the women that he wanted them to learn in quietness apparently there was another way women were acting I guess and needed to be instructed about that that they needed to be less noisy less clamorous or whatever they were being I don't have any problem with that but it would be wrong I think to impose the word silence on that passage as some translations do and some people do let the women learn in silence in 1 Timothy 2.11 rather to be quiet is a better word and everyone ought to do that when they are learning anyway now he didn't allow them to teach either he says I don't let a woman teach or have authority over a man and I said already I think in the context he is referring to the role of a bishop or an elder he doesn't allow women in that role because that's the authoritative teaching role basically the church is new I think and he didn't want women in that particular role there was a woman I told this story in some settings before most of you haven't heard it I was asked by a woman in Hawaii in Youth with a Mission what she should have said in a witnessing situation that she had found herself in she had been witnessing to a woman and the woman had said to her I'm not interested in Christianity that's not for me Christianity will not allow me as a woman into its highest positions and therefore I cannot be all that I can be in Christianity therefore I'm not interested and the lady who had been witnessing to her had not quite known how to answer that she asked me what she should have said and I said well you should have said this you're right Christianity is not for you it's not for anybody who is going to call the plays for God Christianity is not for anyone who says if I can't rise to the top I'm not playing Christianity is for people who come and deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Jesus and the church is already overly full of the other kind of people who don't belong there at all and it's just as well if you say I won't join any religion that I can't be the boss it's just as well you stay as far from the church as you can thank you we've got enough people with that attitude and we don't need any Christianity is not for people with that attitude Christianity is for people who are broken who say God if you want me to lick the carpets clean after everyone is gone you tell me that's what I'll do I'm not talking about women I'm talking about men, women, you name it a Christian is one who is a slave and he doesn't come with his agenda and so Paul doesn't let women in the eldership that's very clear from his

teaching now the other passage in 1 Corinthians 14 is very difficult the reason it's difficult is it says it's a shame for a woman to speak in the church I don't let the women speak in the church in the text of reception it says let your women keep silence in the church but in the Alexandrian text it just says let women keep silence and that is different because if Paul is laying down a thing for women in general or if he's saying your women you Corinthian would let your women keep silence it could be that there's some situation in Corinth that he's particularly trying to remedy and many think that is the case we don't know exactly what it was many preachers have made up scenarios that we can't prove from the scripture but it is entirely possible since the church was known to have something of a chaotic worship service it is possible that some of the chaos was being caused by noisy women and Paul said listen we'll fix this real good just let those women be silent you know, I mean that could be what he was saying that might be all he was saying or it may not have been I don't know for sure there are people who claim the passage wasn't written by Paul but I don't think they have very good reasons for saying that I would approach the passage as a very difficult passage to interpret for another reason one is that Paul in telling them to be silent there seems to be contradicting what he said in 1 Corinthians 11 where he allowed women to pray and prophesy if their heads were covered now, in other words in chapter 11 it does not sound like Paul believed women had to be silent in the church and then three chapters later he says let your women keep silence so this has always caused a bit of a problem and I'll tell you what commentators have sometimes done 1 Corinthians 14 let your women keep silence is given to modify or qualify chapter 11 about praying and prophesying they say this women could pray and prophesy but Paul didn't want them to think they could do it in the church so he said let them be silent in the church they can pray and prophesy elsewhere that's one possibility others have felt that 1 Corinthians 11 qualifies the other that women should in general be silent in the church but with this qualification they can pray and prophesy if their heads are covered no one can say with certainty how the two passages are to be reconciled in my opinion now if you say you know for sure that's fine, more power to you I have thought about this a great deal I've read a great deal about it I don't know more than some people do on it but I will say this it does appear to me that Paul did allow women to speak in the churches in some form I do, on balance I believe the evidence is best that when Paul said that women could pray and prophesy with their heads covered he meant in the church meeting now he doesn't say so in 1 Corinthians 11 but I think he meant it because when he does talk about prophecy in chapter 14 he says that prophecy is for the edification of the church so one would expect that if women were going to prophesy it would be for the edification of the church and it would be best if it did in a church meeting I suppose maybe not maybe Paul knew something I don't know and something different I will say one thing interesting and that is that Paul stayed in the house of Philip the evangelist who had four daughters who prophesied and yet when God had a word for Paul the four daughters didn't prophesy to him Agabus came while he was staying in that house and bound himself with Paul's girdle and said thus shall the man who owns this girdle be bound by the Jews when he

comes to Jerusalem fascinating Paul was staying for a while in this home there were four prophetesses there but when a word was to be brought to Paul a man named Agabus came and gave it to him not the four prophetesses now if women were to prophesy outside the church at the home for example that would have been the perfect occasion for them to do it he was living in the same house with those prophetesses and they never as far as we know prophesied to him I don't know if that's relevant to the issue of what should be done in the church the point I'm making is there is a great deal of unclarity about this particular passage enough in my opinion to preclude any of us being too dogmatic about what women can or cannot do from this passage alone there are other passages like that in 1 Corinthians 11 that have to be considered I would say however I don't like to ignore any passage certainly and I do believe that we can't act as if it is not there but I do believe we have to realize that whatever view we take of it there are some other intelligent people many of them godly evangelicals who disagree with whatever view we take here's what my approach to that passage would be to 1 Corinthians 14 34-37 I would affirm the elements of the passage that find confirmation in the rest of scripture and leave the rest undecided the things I don't know what they mean I just won't pretend like I know what they mean one thing we can affirm is that women should retain a quiet if not entirely mute demeanor in the church gatherings that agrees not only with what Paul says in that passage but with 1 Timothy 2 verse 11 and 12 and also 1 Peter 3-4 that women should have a meek and quiet spirit as their ornament so I mean that women should retain a quiet demeanor is certainly certainly something we can get from that passage it may say more than that but it certainly doesn't say less than that secondly that women's demeanor at church as elsewhere should convey the fact that they are subordinate to their own husbands that agrees with Paul's concerns in 1 Corinthians 11 it agrees with his concerns throughout the rest of his writings it seems to me and Peter's in 1 Peter 3 that is to say whatever else it may mean it certainly means this that the women in the church should be modest humble quiet submissive to their husbands and all their behavior should be governed by those rules I believe that if a woman attends a particular assembly that doesn't let women speak at all that shouldn't be a problem now you might think that's easy for me to say because I get to talk a lot in our church but I'll tell you the truth and I'll tell you very honestly I've been in churches that didn't let me speak no problem if I feel God's led me to go to a particular church I feel that He wants me to just comply with whatever it is that they whatever their policies are unless they're ghastly policies there's plenty of places women can speak outside the church and I'm not saying a church necessarily has to have the policy that women can't speak that's not my position but if a woman is attending a church where that is the position of the church I don't think it should be a big problem unless she's ambitious I don't think ambition is a good attitude for anyone male or female that woman who said I won't be a Christian because I as a woman can't rise to the top of the ladder or totem pole or whatever I think man I don't want anyone in leadership in any group I attend who has that attitude I don't care if they're a man or a woman anyone who says I won't be here unless I can be boss get me as far from that

church as I can get I don't want men or women in that role over me if that attitude is there now let me close which probably by the clock I should have done that a long time ago and maybe by other considerations too let me close by saying affirmatively what the Bible says women do do what their ministry is or can be I mean if the women are not supposed to talk a lot in the church meetings that shouldn't be a problem there's plenty for the women to do that's every bit as useful if not more so first of all she can be a wife to her husband and mother to her children oh just that yeah just that that's the principal thing that women apparently are called to do Paul says in 1 Timothy 5 I will that the young women marry guide the house, rear children and give no occasion for the word of God to be reproached or for the enemy to speak reproachfully he apparently felt that when women begin to move out of that God ordained role there is always the greater danger that the word of God may be reproached certainly has been in our society and guess what maybe no connection but women have certainly moved out of that role we certainly have a lot of reproach in the word of God right now in the modern church there's much in the New Testament to argue that a woman's primary role in most cases now Paul acknowledges some women remain virgins to serve God in other ways but in most cases a woman's primary role is as a wife and a mother in fact the very passage in 1 Timothy I don't let a woman teacher have authority over men but it says but she shall be saved in childbearing in other words in motherhood in the role of motherhood she will work out her salvation as men work out their salvation whatever roles God calls them to another thing women can do besides being wives and mothers is according to scripture she can pray and prophesy if her submission is proper in 1 Corinthians 11 we read that those are good things prophecy Paul indicated prophecy is the most elevated and desirable of all the gifts Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14 I desire the best gifts especially prophecy he said anyone who prophesies edifies the church Paul said that's what you want he said I would that you all spoke in tongues but more that you prophesy so I mean prophecy is one of the most desirable gifts and it does not withheld from women Paul says she can pray she can prophesy those are good prayer is that powerful or what I think I think women are given all the powerful stuff to do at least not withheld from them it's not exclusively for them to do but they're not as women excluded from it a third thing if she has teaching abilities see some people say well Steve how can you say that women shouldn't be the elder of the church when she might be the best teacher in the church well there might be a lot of good women who can teach well I hope so because Paul said that women should teach other women I hope that he gives teaching gifts to some of them it says in Titus chapter 2 that the older women should admonish the younger women and it's not just in short sound bites but to teach them how to love their husbands love their children manage the house and a whole bunch of other practical stuff that takes a lot of teaching and training and people don't know those things instinctively and the older women are supposed to teach those things according to Titus 2 verses 3, 4 and 5 also women can teach men outside of the church apparently in unofficial settings with their husbands we have at least the example of Priscilla and Aquila given in Acts chapter 18 now these people were Paul's fellow workers in Corinth

and in Ephesus they were close to him they risked their necks he said in Romans 16 for him and they were very close workers they certainly knew Paul's policies but when Apollos came to Ephesus his doctrines were not quite right and it says that Priscilla and Aquila took him aside apparently in their home not in the church meeting and they plural instructed him more perfectly in the ways of God Priscilla and Aquila husband and wife team not in a church meeting did instruct a man not just a man a teacher a preacher and he received it from them apparently he didn't think they were out of order in doing that so a woman is capable of teaching if she's capable of teaching but it's a question of who is she supposed to teach and in what settings that's the issue finally what a woman can do and this is the positive of what a woman can do in terms of ministry is she can occupy the loftiest of all offices in the church the office of a slave or a servant now that might sound like a bunch of chauvinistic double talk but it's it's what the Bible teaches he that would be chief among you must be the servant of all and he would be the greatest must be the slave of all if somebody thinks that the way up is up they're in the wrong organization and anyone who thinks that by saying women cannot be in authority over men they're holding women down that's what they keep saying the church holds women down down? do these people believe what Jesus said or do they or do they just ignore it these people who are pushing for more exalted positions for women or for themselves or their men they don't understand Christianity and it's just as well that people who don't understand Christianity don't get into leadership in Christianity I'd say the less they understand Christianity the further from leadership they should be kept the role of a servant is the exalted position let me show you what Paul said that a woman can do I don't know if women like this if they're carnal they won't I don't suppose but to me if I were a woman seeking to be a handmaid of the Lord I'd be very glad for this kind of instruction he's writing about widows and how the church should support older widows who can't remarry or won't remarry because they're committed to just serving God but not every older woman not every older widow was to be accepted in this particular elite number and in 1st Timothy 5 9 and 10 he in writing he writes the qualifications for these widows like he writes the qualifications for elders in an earlier chapter but he says these women must be well reported for good works if she has brought up children if she has lodged strangers if she has washed the saints feet if she has relieved the afflicted if she has diligently followed every good work that's what she's supposed to be that's now realize these are older widows over 60 years old a younger woman who might hope to someday be admitted into this elite core would say well how do I get there from here well I'll tell you what when you're over 60 they're going to look and see whether you wash the saints feet whether you relieve the afflicted whether you're busy with every good work whether you you know whatever these other things are you lodge strangers rear children this is the servant role that these women have accepted before they're accepted into the role of godly widowhood now I want to say that the attitudes of self promotion of discontent with one's calling and of envy class envy of other groups is these are attitudes that are not very appropriate for Christians of either gender and it was Eve's discontent and envy of god that caused her to get into a lot of trouble and we

know that because god had given her everything a person could want but he'd withheld one thing and the devil got her thinking about that one thing you can't do that and that was what she became discontent with that and got herself and us into a lot of trouble you know when you think about it god has given women a lot of great things to do even when it comes to teaching they can teach other women they can teach children Timothy was taught by his mother and his grandmother and he was taught in the scriptures he's known the scriptures from his childhood because his mother and grandmother taught him that there's no forbidding of women to teach children think about that a woman teaching children she's teaching boys and girls she's teaching men of the next generation I mean if Paul didn't think women were to be trusted because they would be deceived he better not turn them loose on the next generation of Christian men to teach them from childhood up that's what the Roman Catholic Church wants give me a child until he's seven and you can have him the rest of the time you put an impressionable little child in the hands of a teacher and you've marked his life for good and yet Paul had no problem with the women taking that role women can that's three quarters of the world's population women and children three quarters of the world's population they can teach but if he says I don't let them teach or have authority over men some women say why not that too? it's not enough to have all these trees over here why not that tree also? better to not ask those questions frankly and I'm not just saying just shut up and don't ask questions I'm just saying better for your spiritual life men and women to not say why has God only given me all of this and he hasn't also given me that there whatever that might be that is not a healthy position for a Christian to be thinking I think I'd like to close with a quote that I give frequently when I teach on this subject because it's so choice it's from Elizabeth Elliott she wrote it as a letter to the editor in Christianity Today after they'd had an issue advocating women ordination of women in ministry and so forth she obviously doesn't agree with that those of you who know Elizabeth Elliott I don't think she really needs any introduction to most Christians but she wrote a letter to the editor in Christianity Today and she wrote these words leadership for the Christian means servanthood fulfillment for the Christian is not an achievement but a byproduct of self-denial true liberation for the Christian woman is not a right but a reward of humble obedience wouldn't the unutterably boring woman's issue dissolve into nothingness if all of us men and women alike would forsake the power struggle and follow him who did not count equality a thing to be grasped at but stripped himself of all privilege and humbled himself even to the point of dying that is that may not be a rebuke to most of the Christian women in this group but it certainly is a rebuke to those who are chafing under biblical roles now I hope that I did not make it sound like men have a more desirable position than women in the church I personally don't believe that is the case maybe some women maybe some men would like the man's role better than I do some men I guess like to take charge I've always had to be forced to do that but I don't like it and I just assumed someone else did it but the man has responsibilities the woman has responsibilities but the responsibilities of each are defined in scripture and it doesn't do any good to go and say I wish it was this way or that way or I wish it was otherwise or

our culture doesn't agree with this or that who cares what the culture agrees with we have to decide are we going to go with what God said and be the body of Christ expressing the holiness of God in the way that he commanded us or are we going to tinker with it and see if we can fix it improve it I'd certainly advocate that we don't do that because I don't think we can improve on God's model and I think that the modern church exhibits characteristics of what happens when people do just that they tamper and tinker and change and improve on what God said it's not an improvement it brings a reproach to the gospel you