

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

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The subject I'm speaking on this evening "The Role of Women in the Church" has been probably today one of the issues most in the forefront within the body of Christ. It's certainly an issue that is capable of dividing believers one from another. I want to say at the outset that what I share with you this evening is shared as a fellow brother in the Lord. I am not in the position of delivering the final word on the subject, which if you disagree with me you are anathema. I'm not saying that at all. I simply share with you a perspective that is formed from both years of experience and years of looking at the word of God in a particular kind of way. I belong to a denomination, the Assemblies of God, which ordained women from its inception. It ordained women to the ministry. The Assemblies of God was formed in 1914, six years before women in this country had the right to vote. So no one can say that the denomination that I am a part of is lately arrived on the scene and has a position in regard to women in the ministry that has been formed as a reaction to a church that is reeling under the assault of the women's liberation movement. We have held a position in my denomination on this matter for almost 70 years. In fact it goes back to actually 1901 when the Pentecostal movement began in this country in this century from the outset. In those churches women were recognized alongside of men as being equally gifted, as being equally called to the ministry, as being equally potential persons for the pastorate. So I grew up in that kind of an atmosphere. My roots are there and I can appreciate although I don't fully know what it is like to have been raised in another church tradition that would have been opposite of that and therefore led one to different conclusions.

I simply say that at the beginning to let you know where I come from. And to let you know that what I share on this issue I do not perceive as an attempt by the church to catch up with the world. Rather from my perspective it is the world that is finally catching up to the church.

I should also say that my mother was an ordained minister for over 50 years. That also probably had some coloration on my thinking.

One of the things that I've had to get used to as a charismatic or as a Pentecostal that was trained in an evangelical seminary which at the time did not have a great deal of room for persons of my theological background, was that the accusation was often made against us is that we Pentecostals often have an experience, then go hunting in the scripture see if there's a text that matches our experience. We find it and then start teaching that as doctrine. The church was made against us that this was how our attitude toward the infilling or the baptism of the Holy Spirit was formed. That we had an experience, that we spoke in tongues, that rather than having a systematic theology based upon first a study of the word of God which dealt with all the passages on the subject we went off and had an experience from three verses in Acts to back it up, or three instances in Acts to back it up, and proclaimed doctrine.

I coined a term for this at some point early in my theological seminary training. I called it Holy Ghost hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is a scientific term for those who work with the data of scripture. It means a method or a science of the interpretation of scripture. What we were alleged to be doing was Holy Ghost hermeneutics. Having an experience with the Holy Spirit, going and finding a scriptural text that would back it up. Then certifying that experience on the basis of the text that we found. Rather than the classical, grammatical, historical interpretation of

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scripture which said collect all the data, do the systematic biblical theology and when you've got all the data together then you can trust the experience – go ahead and have the experience. The problem with people that are sometimes in that perspective is that they never get all the data together so they may never have the experience.

Be that as it may I was troubled by that allegation that we in the Pentecostal or charismatic tradition were guilty of handing the scriptures in a careless way. We were guilty of Holy Ghost hermeneutics. I felt that way until I discovered that that's exactly how the early church functioned the most critical issue that faced the New Testament church. That critical issue was whether or not Gentiles should be included as full participants in the Christian faith without the need for circumcision or the need to keep Jewish dietary laws and Jewish legalistic requirements.

I want to share with you three examples out of the book of Acts which should show how the early church faced a sensitive issue on which the scripture itself seemed to have two trains of thought and how they resolved that issue. Then take the principles off that issue and apply them to the whole matter of the calling of women and the role of women in the ministry.

I set all the stage for that because I'm simply saying that I'm coming in the backdoor of this issue. I have never seen anyone that handles the data quite like I'm doing it. But again it's explained because this is the tradition that I have come from and this is the need that I've had to develop as an apologetic for the way we as charismatic people handle and understand scripture. I think it's very New Testament.

Let me cite the first example of what I call Holy Ghost hermeneutics – having an experience and then finding the scripture to substantiate it.

It occurs in Acts 10:9-16. The experience is simply this. Peter is on a rooftop at Joppa at Simon the tanner's house. He has a revelation that comes to him in the noontime hour that tells him, "Simon Peter. Rise, kill and eat." Inside that sheet are all manner of unclean animals – reptiles, snakes, lizards – all those things in there. Peter says, No, I have never in my life eaten anything unclean.

Again the vision comes, again Peter says no, again the vision comes, again Peter protests. But it is through that vision, it is through that experience the Lord opens his heart to receive the couriers from Cornelius, the Gentile centurion's house. So that through that experience of the vision, Peter is made open and willing to begin to learn the vision of the unclean food that God is no respecter of persons. And that his kingdom which was the sheet let down from heaven, there are all manner of people – some clean Jews, some unclean Gentiles.

What is significant about Peter's experience is that the experience "rise, kill and eat" is attested by the scripture. Three years at least before that Jesus in Mark 7:19 had explicitly declared all food clean. But Peter had never acted upon that teaching. He had never violated his Jewish background. In spite of the Lord declaring all foods clean, he had never eaten anything unclean. He had never had a hot dog. He had never had a bologna sandwich. He never had ham with his eggs.

But now he has the experience and the experience sets him free and there is certainly as he's looking back said, Why didn't I act on the scripture all these years. He needed the experience to activate the scripture.

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A second key incident comes when Peter needs to defend his visit to Cornelius' house. The setting is Jerusalem, Acts 11. There are several principles that are involved in this setting. First of all many in the church saw a violation of scripture. Peter, how could you do this? How could you go among persons who are uncircumcised and who break Jewish regulations and dietary laws? How could you preach the gospel to them? How could you stand for it when the Holy Spirit fell on them and not tell them that there was something more they needed to do to be a member of the community of God?

So no doubt they took in their hand the Old Testament and began to quote the scriptures that had to do with circumcision, that had to do with distinctions from Leviticus between unclean and clean food. And other kinds of requirements they could have read. Not everyone saw it Peter's way. Many saw in his action a violation of the scripture.

Peter's defense on that occasion was not an excursus on biblical theology. That is, Peter didn't say, Let's go through these scriptures point by point. Let's look at them all and see where they're all leading. What Peter's defense was he appealed to the fact that the Holy Spirit had led him and he affirmed that his leading was attested by the work of the Spirit himself. Because the Spirit gave them the same gift as he did to us at the beginning and who was I to say no.

Finally Peter then backs up the experience at Cornelius' house with an affirmation from the word itself. He says in Acts 11:16-17 I remember what the Lord had said. John baptized with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. So the bottom line again is Peter takes the experience he has had, which he attests to the fact that the Spirit has led him into the experience, and he omits every scripture which taught about circumcision and singles in on the scripture which the Lord has said about being baptized with the Spirit and uses that as his final clenching moment of argument. The matter still isn't resolved.

So it comes up again in Acts 15, the third case where the Gentile-Jewish issue arises. It is a key moment in the book of Acts because now there are thousands of Gentile believers. If the church is going to retract and dig in and become Judaizer church or an all-Jewish church, it is going to have to rethink things considerably.

So what happens in Acts 15, the principles become more detailed. And they are more numerous because it is a more formal occasion. These things emerge as you look in Acts 15. They tell us first of all that we must be factionally prepared to look at what God is doing. And indeed, Paul and Barnabus report to the church everything that God had done through them. They took into account first of all what God had been doing already in the world.

The second thing is we must be prepared to hear objections by persons who do quote the scripture. Verse 5, Some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses. So there were people who had the weight, they believed, of scripture on their side on this issue.

Third, we must be patient in sensitive matters to work them out. They require much discussion. Verses 6 and 7 tells us there was much discussion on this issue. The apostles didn't try to steam roll over anyone. There was a full discussion on the manner.

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The fourth principle that was at stake in this counsel was that we are required to give weight to the counsel of persons who the Holy Spirit has used. Verses 8-12. So that in this matter Peter stands up and bears witness to what the Holy Spirit has done through him. And Barnabus and Paul stand up and bear witness to what the Holy Spirit has done through them.

Then five, experience must always be tested by an appropriate application of the scripture. Verses 13-18. James the leader of the counsel, brings the matter to a close by appealing to Amos 9:11-12, which prophesied the inclusion of the Gentiles in David's kingdom. It's very fascinating here what happens. Because so much of the Old Testament could have been appealed to.

The Judizer scriptures, the ones that require circumcision and Jewish rites would far outweigh the others. What happens in the Jerusalem counsel is the church itself understands that there are some scriptures that are given for Israel, when it is Israel. Given for a period of time to be worked out within culture in terms of application. But then there are underlying principles, which become eternal and leap above the cultural norm and become therefore, expansive and testable for the church for all time.

James, although he has all the scriptures to appeal to, only appeals to that part, which corresponds to and affirms to the way the Spirit has been leading the church.

Finally I think a principle in the Jerusalem conference is we are not to rub the cat's fur the wrong way. At the Jerusalem counsel even though they said, yes God has included the Gentiles, out of the four requirements that are laid down, two of them are purely cultural. Don't eat things strangled and don't eat blood. Because that would prohibit good fellowship between Jews and Gentiles when they sit down at table together. It's offensive to Jewish mentality to eat things like that. So rather than make people throw up at the agape table they simply said, let's have some agreement not to make people sick when we eat together. Don't rub the cat's fur the wrong way.

Why do I take time to develop this theme? It's because it seems to me that Acts 2:17-18, which quote Joel 2 "In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophecy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophecy." That scripture and Galatians 3:28 which says that "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male nor female." Are the scriptures which stand for us on the women's issue what Amos 9:11-12 stood on the Gentile issue in the early church. That is when you look at the data of scripture itself you can find people using the scripture to argue from one side and you can find people using the scripture to argue from the other side. It's not that scripture speaks contrary to self. Not that scripture speaks against itself. But rather it is finding the eternal principle as distinct from a particular temporary application of a requirement or a restriction.

In fact in Galatians 3:28 that verse "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female," delineates the three major areas where the barriers between groups are to be broken down because of the gospel. They are listed in that order in Galatians 3:28 and they're breaking up in about that order.

In the first century there were many Christians who thought it was wrong that there should not be a barrier between Jew and Greek. Gradually though the church resolved that issue.

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A century and a quarter ago there were Christians in this country dying for a belief that there was a distinction between the slave and the free. And it took some time for the body of Christ to work through that issue that in Christ there is no distinction between slave and free.

The third area now that the church has dealing with in the modern time in the latter outpouring of the Spirit has to do with the inclusion of women. I think I see in the scripture the imagery of grass that is planted underneath cultural concrete. After awhile the grass itself begins to push on the concrete and the seed which has been planted under the concrete becomes a liberating seed. The gospel carries within it the roots of liberation.

When you look specifically at the issue of women in the church we need to look at it from scriptural data. And by the way, my early Pentecostal forebearers simply believed in Acts 2:17-18 and Galatians 3:28 and said, Women are called by God. They are equal prophets. They may equally minister in the body. What has happened in the human race because of the fall where woman is given the lesser position has been reversed in the cross. They are now again on equal footing because man and woman in the Garden of Eden before the fall was given the power of dominion. Now Christ on the cross is reversing the curse.

They would say that but they didn't worry about 1 Timothy 2:12-15. That's because they were using Holy Ghost hermeneutics. I'm saying that to be fair with the totality of scripture we must talk about 1 Timothy 2:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 14 and a few other passages we'll look at tonight. We ought to look at the totality of the word.

Let's look first of all before we look at problem texts as to what the scripture's stance is as to women's involvement.

There are for example women and their relationship to Jesus. Jesus, we know, broke Jewish tradition in regard to treatment of women. He talked, for example, with the woman at the well. And he talked with her in a way that surprised his contemporaries. That he would take his time to talk not only with a woman but with a Samaritan woman.

He set aside role casting. Mary and Martha, sisters. One of them was doing the womanly thing working. And one, Mary, was doing the manly thing – being taught. Many Jewish rabbis taught that a woman did not have the right to learn. But Jesus rebukes Martha for insisting that Mary do the womanly thing and commends her for doing the manly thing – listening to his teaching. He insisted on an end to moral sexual discrimination. He required for example that the woman who was taken in adultery not be subjected to a different test than the man.

In his resurrection he appeared first to women. If women were the first to fall – through Eve came the transgression – so also the resurrection news was given first to a woman. And he promises an ultimate consummation in the kingdom to come that the sexual differences that exist between male and female in the age to come will be broken up. And there will be indeed no marriage in heaven. He looks forward to a day when the effects of the fall are ultimately and forever set aside.

Jesus went way beyond what the culture and his contemporaries thought of and how they interacted with women.

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When we look at another theme, women and the Spirit, we find women as full participants in the Pentecostal community of Acts 1 and 2. They were there with the apostles not to do the cooking. But they were there to pray. And they were also recipients of the promise that the Spirit would come upon them and they would receive power when that Spirit had come.

Peter in his sermon on the day of Pentecost therefore quotes Joel and says sons and daughters will prophecy. And to prophecy is not just an occasional speech now and then. It is the proclamation of God's word and God's heart. He says that men and women in the days of the Spirit would prophecy.

In Acts we further see women that are ministry gifted by the Spirit. Philip's daughters for example in Acts 21:9, four of them, were prophetesses. And 1 Corinthians 11 we find men as well as women praying and prophesying in public. We look also at Paul and his relationships to women. He had a couple team that was associated very closely with him. Priscilla and Aquila who taught Apollos the way of God more accurately. They were persons who had enough grasp of doctrine and of the mind of Christ to be able to communicate it to one of the most gifted speakers and ministers of the New Testament church, the silver tongue orator Apollos. Taught by Priscilla and Aquila. Extremely unusual in biblical times that when a couple's names are mentioned that the woman's name comes first. Yet out of the six occasions where Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in the New Testament on four of those six, Priscilla's name comes first. Perhaps it can be suggested that it is first because unlike other couples of the period, she had an unusual insight and ministry of the word or relationship to Aquila herself.

In Romans 16 of the greetings that Paul sends to the church at Rome, out of 28 names, eight or possibly nine of them are women. One of whom is named Phoebe whom the translators of the New Testament is called a deaconess. Which in actual fact is a mistranslation. It is simply deacon. It is the same name as those who were chosen as deacons of the church. But some of the male translators during the King James error could not admit the possibility of a woman ever holding the same office as the man so they deliberately put the feminine ending on a noun that did not have the feminine ending. Same word as applies to the men. She was a deacon in the Cenchræ church outside of Corinth. He refers to Andronicus and Junias who are his fellow kinsmen who are in the early company of the apostles. And Junias is perhaps a woman's name, a companion of Andronicus. He refers in Philippians 4:2-3 to Euodias and Syntyche as his co-workers, a similar word that he uses on occasion to refer to the men who worked with him in ministry such as Timothy.

And in Galatians 3:28 which is written before 1 Corinthians and written of course before 1 Timothy, he says that there is in Christ no distinction between male and female.

Marcus Dodds a New Testament commentator has said that these three mighty distinctions that have tyrannized over the ancient world were abolished all for once in Christ Jesus. It dawned on the barbarian that if there was no Roman citizenship for him nor any entrance into the mighty commonwealth of Greek literature he had a citizenship in heaven and could command even with his barbaric speech the ears of the most high. It dawned on the slave as his fetters galled him or as his soul shrank under the sad hopelessness of his life that he was God's redeemed rescued from the bondage of his own evil heart. And superior to all curse became God's friend. And it dawned on the woman that she was neither man's toy nor man's slave, a mere luxury or an appendage to his establishment. But that she herself had a soul, a responsibility equally

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momentous with the man's and therefore a life to frame for herself. These ideas were astonishing and subversive.

There are on the other hand in all fairness to the New Testament data on the role of women two scriptures which seem to exclude the possibility of equality of women in roles of ministry with men. Even though we look at the attestation of the fact that according to Acts 2 and Galatians 3:28 the Spirit is going to create a new age when both men and women side by side have the distinction end, which had existed between them.

First Corinthians 14:34-36 is such a passage and we need to look at it for just a moment. "As in all the congregation of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission as the law says. If they want to inquire about something they should ask their own husbands at home for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you or were you the only people to whom it reached?"

We need to first of all look at what Paul's word "silent" does not mean in this context. We know from reading 1 Corinthians 11 the scripture itself must interpret scripture. We get an idea of what silence did not mean. It was not a prohibition of women praying or prophesying in the Christian congregation. Because 1 Corinthians 11 specifically allows women to pray and to prophecy. Albeit they must respect social conventions. They must pray or prophecy with a veil over their head less they be brought into disrepute and unless the church be brought into disrepute in the world.

Might I say today that if one of the women of this church or my wife for example chose to begin wearing a veil to church you would begin looking a little askance at her. And soon if she kept on wearing that veil and I kept saying, "Would you mind taking that veil off? People are looking at you and I'm uncomfortable that my wife be the veiled one of the church." If she refuses to take off the veil she would be standing against my authority and she would be therefore not submitting to me and she would therefore also be bringing me and the church into disrepute in the world. If all the women of this church wore veils people in the world would come in saying, What kind of a strange group is this?

What Paul is talking about in respect to the veil is the kind of things that require social convention. In Corinth for a woman not to wear a veil was to identify herself as a prostitute, an immoral woman. Of course a woman wore a veil. Greek or Jew it didn't matter. Of course she did.

If I wear a hat to the pulpit and preach in a baseball cap and pray in a baseball cap I would be offending social convention and ought not to do that.

What you want to look for in scripture is the underlying principle not necessarily specifically culturally it is expressed.

Paul has already said women may pray or prophesy. Silence appears to be something related to worship disorder.

As a missionary's kid I was in a culture where the men sat on one side and the women sat on the other side and there were backless benches. The women in that society were not as educated as

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the men and there were things said in the service that the women didn't understand and the chance were that the women would be in a constant hub-bub without order being kept or calling out a question to the other side of the room to her husband. Paul's word therefore in a third world culture makes perfect sense: women, keep quiet over there on your side in church. If you've got anything to ask your husband don't shout it out. Ask him at home. Keep silent in the church.

Some have even postulated that one of the Greek mystery religion cults at Ephesus which had a strong female only clientele had a strong emphasis in ecstatic utterances and ecstatic kinds of behavior. He was suggesting that some of this had moved into the church at Corinth and women were especially kind of flaky in terms of their spiritual manifestations. So he said Cool it! Silence.

He was not forbidding praying or prophesying. He appears to be talking about worship disorder. He says if you've got things to ask your husbands, ask them at home.

When you come to 1 Timothy 2:11-15 you have a somewhat different passage. You have Paul saying a woman should learn in quietness and in full submission. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. She must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be kept safe through the child bearing [the NIV has "through childbirth" which I feel is a poor translation] if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

We need to examine this scripture first of all in light of its social background, the Jewish background. A woman was a thing at the disposal of her husband or father. She was forbidden to take part in the synagogue service and sat apart from or in back of the men in the synagogue. A woman came to the synagogue to hear. A man came to learn. It was forbidden for a woman to teach in school. A strict rabbi would not greet a woman on the street. A woman's duty was to send her children to the synagogue, attend to domestic concerns, and leave her husband free for study and work and keep house for him until he returns.

The good old days!

A Jewish man thanked God that he was not [and this is a prayer from the period] "a gentile, a slave, or a woman." In the Greek world Timothy, when Paul is writing to Timothy, Timothy is at the town of Ephesus. Ephesus was a town in which the temple of Diana was located, one of the seven wonders of the Roman world. Women were degraded into serving as priestess prostitutes. Respectable Greek women led a confined life. A respectable Greek woman lived in her own quarters, did not appear at meals, never appeared in the street alone and never went to any public meeting unattended. In the Christian church in Ephesus, women also coming out of that culture had problems of identification. Women at Ephesus appeared to be especially susceptible to heretical teaching. 2 Timothy 3:6 "And appear not to be discerning of teachers who kind of flatter their way into the body and they set themselves up as easy listeners."

Also it's clear from 1 Timothy 5:13 that younger widows do not know how to use their time and are gadding about from place to place and house to house spending their time in idleness. Yet interestingly enough this is the same town where Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila, Acts 18.

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Given that kind of a background we look specifically at what Paul was saying for the Christian woman at Ephesus. The first thing he says is positive. A woman should learn. This was in distinct contrast to Jewish culture and much of pagan culture. They held that woman was not worthy of learning. Some of us can go back to periods of time even in our country where it was not in some quarters held that a woman should get more than an elemental education if that. Paul says simply, first of all, a woman should learn.

Secondly he says a woman should learn in quietness and with all submission. The word for quietness is the same word that is used in chapter 2:2, that we ought to pray for those in governmental positions that we are to live peaceable and quiet lives. The word “quietness” is not necessarily a negative word. I would suspect that any teacher would like to teach pupils of either sex who learn with quietness and submission. That is a readiness to learn rather than a combative feisty spirit that says I know it all and you’re not going to tell me anything.

Thirdly Paul says, “I do not permit a woman to teach.” This at the surface looks like a command that is in the church for all time. But notice carefully the language. Paul does not say, I never permit a woman to teach. He says I do not teach a woman to teach. The tense is in the active present tense and it can be just as easily translated “I am not permitting a woman to teach.” Or even expanded to say, “I am not presently permitting a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” That is there is no language in the verb tense that requires this to be a command on the church once and for all ages. Given the particular circumstances at the church at Ephesus it is very easy to see why this prohibition was in effect there and in the other churches where Paul had pioneered.

Thirdly, Paul says I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man. The word “to have authority” is used here, this specific Greek verb, is used only in this one place in the New Testament. It carries the connotation to interrupt, to dictate, to domineer. I do not he says permit a woman to interrupt, dictate or domineer over a man. Well understood is that principle. I might add that is simply a sound principle for all human relationships.

I was thinking in terms of my relationships in regards to this congregation. This congregation as much as they trust me and support me as pastor do not give me the privilege of interrupting, dictating, or domineering over them. I serve among you as a minister of the gospel. One of the unique problems at Ephesus appeared to be a group of libertine gals who want to take over the whole thing and run it lock, sock and barrel no matter who they run over and no matter what authority in the home they question. Paul simply says this is impermissible. I might say what he forbids here of a woman he will also in other passages forbid of a man. John the apostle will rebuke Diotrophes “who likes to put himself first.” A man – the same kind of principles that is involved.

When Paul says, For Adam was first formed then Eve. Here you have a very critical word “for”. “For” can be translated either as a positive – therefore – or it can be translated as furthermore. If it is “therefore” you get a whole different connection to the verse. “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man. She must be silent *therefore* Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Therefore Paul is rooting his requirements in the creation itself and saying therefore permanently woman can never teach.

However if it is the word “for” in simply the connective sense – furthermore – he simply is going on as he does by the way in verse 5 where he uses the word “for” as a “furthermore” rather than

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as a “therefore.” “For there is one God. Furthermore there is one God and one mediator between God and man.” He does not “Therefore there is one God.” Verse 5 is not connected in that sense with verse 4.

So here in verse 13, “Furthermore Adam was formed first then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” Paul is saying that when you look at the created order you’ll find that through woman the fall first came. But - that’s the great word in verse 15. “But woman will be kept safe through the child bearing.” Here is one of the most difficult and complex scriptures in all the New Testament to exegete. And therefore I think it would be wise to say that nobody on the woman’s position ought to build their theology solely on this verse since it is capable of being looked at a number of ways. We’d be better off to base it on Acts 2:17-18 and Galatians 3:28, which are very clear text.

But I’ll give it a stab. “But women will be kept safe through the child bearing.” In my understanding Paul is saying here is that the child bearing is the birth of the child or the birth of the Messiah. The women’s liberation, the lifting of this injunction, this penalty that has come upon woman through the fall, is going to be lifted through the bearing of the Christchild. It is through the Christ, through the Messiah, through the child that woman’s salvation is coming. Paul here couldn’t be saying that women are going to be saved if they become mothers. That sets aside the whole act of grace. He’s not talking about soul salvation here. What he’s saying is something on a different order – women will be saved, they have been brought into the scope of God’s beautiful plan of redemption. Since Eve was the first to fall in this sin, it is through woman that God is pleased to usher the Messiah into the world. But they will be saved through childbirth. Through the bearing of the Child if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

It’s very interesting. In Paul, if you look at the passages on the role of women, and you come to a very startling conclusion. Whenever Paul is talking about women and he relates women to the fall to Eve’s fall, woman is always in the subordinate position. But whenever he’s talking about women in relationship to the cross or the work of Christ, women are in an equal position. Galatians 3:28 is a classic example. “For in Christ [not in Adam] there is no distinction between male and female.” I think therefore in working the mines of scripture one must look at this particular difficult passage and say that while Paul was at Ephesus and while he was establishing the church it was not yet the time for women in that particular culture given the background from which they had come from to be indeed teaching in the church. But the promise of the Spirit is still in focus and is still in effect. In the last days I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.

The appeal therefore can be made to woman’s redemption rather than her ruin. Basically the people in the wing of the church that are in the hierarchy end of things that women is in an inferior position, wind up more heavily appealing to the scriptures which speak of the fall of woman. Persons in the body who are looking at the theme of equality more heavily appeal to the aspect of redemption and the Spirit’s leading. Galatians 3:28 the fact that Jesus was born of a woman. The Samaritan woman of John 4. The fact that Mary sat at his feet. The fact that Mary Magdalene and the other women followed him. Joel 2:28-29 all flesh, daughters and maidservants. The daughters of Philip being prophetesses. Priscilla, Phoebe the deaconess. Euodia and Syntyche being yoke fellows.

In kind of summary in these matters and looking specifically at scriptures, both sides of the issue of women and their involvement in the body of Christ quote scripture. Therefore it is critical that

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we recognize what the Holy Spirit is doing presently in the world and do something which Peter himself did when it came to the Gentile issue. When one can quote both sides of scripture, one had to back off and say, What is the Spirit laying his hands upon. You can always tell what the Spirit is laying his hands upon by two things. By the fruit of the Spirit that flows out of that. And secondly, by the ability of that position to appeal to scripture. It does not mean that there are not other scriptures that may initially look differently. But it is that position that can successfully appeal to the scripture. That is why for example in looking at the whole realm of should homosexuals be fully a member of the body of Christ with heterosexuals one has to say there is no ability of that issue to ever appeal to the scripture because there is no ground in the scripture to appeal to. So therefore if someone has an experience that says God is able to incorporate in the body homosexuals and they can go on being homosexuals as long as they're in covenantal relationship in a marital relationship with their lover like a heterosexual couple is, God can use them. I say, give me the scripture. Show me where it is. Show me where in the last days "I will pour out my Spirit upon all homosexuals. And let them go on being practicing homosexuals."

What we must do is be able to understand to understand the distinction between the women's issue and some of the other issues that are fogging up the cultural landscape today. And understand that Galatians 3:28 articulate the three divisions that are ultimately going to no longer be divisions in the body of Christ. Jew - Greek; slave - free; male - female.

Someone might be concerned about the need to interpret the scripture. Why do we need to go to all this trouble to interpret scripture? Isn't scripture perfectly plain? If scripture were perfectly plain there would be no need for the gift of teaching in the body because no one would ever come and hear a teacher. They could simply read it themselves. But the fact is scripture calls upon us to interpret it. Genesis 3:16 says "a woman shall have pain in the bearing of children." We have to interpret that. Does that for example mean that we are prohibited from giving women anesthesia when they are going through childbirth because the scripture says they're to bear pain, let's let them have pain by it. Let's forget the anesthesia. So we have to bear on that subject other principles of scriptures which talk about mercy and compassion. 1 Corinthians 14:35 "Let a woman keep silent." We have to interpret that. Does that mean education is prohibited for women?

1 Timothy 2:8 "Men are to raise their hands in public prayer," does that mean that we as men in this congregation are disobedient to God if in times of worship we do not raise our hands when we stand for prayer?

1 Thessalonians 5:26 and four other texts in the New Testament "Christians are required to greet one another with a holy kiss." Does this mean if we greet one another with a handshake we are violating the scripture? We have to look at that.

1 Timothy 5:3-10 - all these from Timothy are coming out of the same passage as 1 Timothy 2. Must the church today have the office of widow. Apparently the early church had an office of widows, 60 years of age and over. Maybe we should.

1 Timothy 5:23 is the believer prevented from drinking water? "Drink no longer water."

1 Timothy 6:1-2 is slavery endorsed as an institution because Paul gives rules of relationship of masters and slaves.

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We understand I think better the current rethinking of women's role if we recall the text relating to slavery were being wrestled with in America 125 years ago. When conditions change our approach needs to be rethought. Not necessary change.

Paul himself by the way shows an ability to monitor a social situation and give differing instructions based upon what he reads the social situation to be. For example 1 Corinthians 7:39 he says he would encourage people who have been married who lose a spouse not to remarry. It is best, he says, to remain single. But about 15 or 20 years later when he is writing to the young widows at Ephesus in 1 Timothy 5:14 he is beginning to observe that if they don't remarry they have devoting themselves completely to the Lord. So he says you better go ahead and get remarried because you'll settle down a whole lot quicker and a whole lot better. Differing counsel based upon how the Holy Spirit was helping him read the existing cultural situation.

Paul is concerned about any cultural practice in the church, which would discredit its reputation in the world. I guess as a pastor today I have a deep concern for this. I'm concerned about any practice in the church, which would bring the church into discredit. I think therefore it's important to look not only at our roots that I had in the Pentecostal movement but to look too at the whole new thing that God is doing in the world. And to say indeed in this day when there is the confusing movement of the women's liberation movement, which is saying things to women that are not scriptural. At that same time God has a parallel liberation movement that is saying, I truly have my gifts of ministry available for all flesh.

I think we're at a moment today in the women's issue like the early church was in Acts 11. We've not yet had the Jerusalem conference. But we are indeed discovering women who have obvious ministry gifts. We need to recognize what the Spirit himself is doing in the world and lay our hands upon that. And let as our twin anchor be both Acts 2 and Galatians 3:28 which promises the Spirit will come upon all flesh. Let that be one anchor. And let the other anchor be the anchor of the future. When I look at the young women that are growing up in our church I don't want it to be said that one of the things that they could never consider was whether or not God could make it possible for them to serve the body of Christ in any role that my son could serve. I want my children to grow up in the kind of atmosphere which I had the opportunity to grow up in which says both men and women can develop to their fullest potential in the Lord and God can use them both equally.

A theologian has made this beautiful comment about the need to look at the word of God again and again as we face issues. He says, "The word has to be free to remake and reform the church over and over again. The moment the church loses interest in working the mines of the word because it thinks it has seen all there is to see that moment the church also loses its power and its credibility in the world. When the church thinks it knows all there is to know the opportunity for surprising discovery is closed. The church then becomes old without perspective and without might and labor and fruitfulness. It is because the church in the sixteenth century threw open the word of God and looked at it a fresh that we have the doctrine of justification by faith. It is because the church in the eighteenth century looked again at the word of God through the urging of John and Charles Wesley that the church saw once more the need to live a holy life. It is because some men and women at the turn of this century took a fresh look at the scripture and the experience and said the Holy Spirit can indeed come upon all flesh, that we had born one of the greatest missionary movements that the world has ever seen – the Pentecostal or charismatic renewal. And it is also because the church again, the Spirit filled church, is looking at the role of

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women and understanding it in light of the promise of scripture that again we are seeing the Spirit do a new and dynamic feature in our time.”

I pray that not only will many of the young men here be considering how in their future life they can serve the Lord and function to their highest capability. But I pray that that will not be an exclusive call upon men only but upon our sons and our daughters the Spirit would come with all his power and his anointing. This I share with you as a fellow traveler in the gospel. If you differ with me I welcome you as my brother or sister in the Lord because we're going to have all eternity to set down and talk about this and enjoy a beautiful, fruitful discussion at the Lord's hands, when he sets both of us straight – forever. I hope you receive it as one who has tried honestly and fairly to understand both what the Holy Spirit is doing today and what the scriptures are saying.