

## Equal Partners in life and leadership Paul in Context – Part 1

Have Chris read the letter (word for word)

What a task I have today. One that feels like it requires two Sundays worth of preamble and caveats – just to give context and perspective.

No matter how much some people can downplay this matter, it is a huge matter, with huge implications for all of us, for how we function as a church, for how we treat one another, for our witness in the world, and especially, simply, for women. So, we're just going to dive into this. I don't think I need to convince you how real and significant this is.

But before we get into Scripture on this, I want to begin by naming a few core convictions or presuppositions that I have as I grapple with the topic at hand (and any topic for that matter).

The first is that, as Psalm 145:8 declares, "*The LORD is gracious and compassionate...*" The God who has revealed Himself to us in the history of Israel, in the story of the early church, and above all, in Jesus Christ, is both **all-Wise and Perfect in His Love**. He is the One who's grace and truth sets captives free. And this is not something new with God – that starts with Jesus or the New Testament, but this is who God has always been – **All Wise and Perfect in Loving**. (more on that in a moment)

And second, because of this conviction, **our ultimate source and final authority** in discerning the wise love of God is found in **Jesus Christ, and the Biblical Scripture** that His Spirit inspired and continues to inspire.

Which means that we **take our stand** on what God has revealed in Scripture—even where it stands against the prevailing perspectives of our culture **OR** against the practice and teaching of our own traditions.

In truth, one of the **deepest convictions** of our evangelical tradition (including our Brethren tradition) is that ***the Voice of Scripture speaks and stands over all others – including the Voice of our traditions.***

Which doesn't mean that we don't take into account church tradition, the wisdom of those who've gone before us, or the insight of great thinkers in our day, but in the end, all our thoughts and conclusions are submitted to God's thoughts and conclusions as revealed to us in Scripture.

The Bible is our **primary reference point** and **ultimate authority** for understanding God's will.

Which leads me to a **third core conviction** – that **we all come to the text of Scripture with biases** (shaped by our experiences, the culture we live in, the times we live in, the models we've had, the teaching we've received, etc).

We can't get away from this.

I read the Bible from the perspective of a 21<sup>st</sup> century, western, modern, white, educated, middle-class, evangelical, Canadian, fair-trade coffee-drinking, male. To say that that doesn't affect how I read the Bible is ludicrous. But that doesn't mean that my natural biases *disqualify* me from being *able* to make sense of God's revelation in Scripture. It simply requires me to go about the work of biblical interpretation in **two ways...**

One, it requires me/us is to do the work of Biblical interpretation **on our knees before God** – seeking God, inviting God—the same God who inspired the original authors – to inspire us, to correct, rebuke and instruct us through His Word and by His Spirit...

And two, to do this **in community**—to not just read and study the Bible on our own, but to do it in conversation with others (either face to face, shoulder to shoulder, or over the shoulder through great books and podcasts)... others who will not only affirm our convictions, but who also will challenge our assumptions. We need the perspectives of others to help us discover and discern **God's** perspective.

And if you don't think this is the case, then **hold up your Hebrew and Greek Bible** – because the simple reality that we are reading the Bible in English tells us that we are dependent upon the grace of God *mediated to us through*

*the wisdom and gifts of others. This is how the Spirit of God has chosen to make God's revelation known to us – through the community of God's people...*

So those are my **presuppositions**—that God is All-Wise and Loving in all He ordains and desires; that the Bible, and at its center, Jesus, is the primary reference point and ultimate authority for understanding God's will; and that interpreting Scripture well requires some work because we all come to the text with biases.

The **other thing** I want to say before we really get into this, is that my understanding of what the Bible says on this matter – what I'm going to bring today – is **not** how I've always understood this. My understanding of what the Bible teaches and how to interpret it has changed significantly – and this change took place **over a number of years**. It was not formed and changed **overnight** (by one sermon, or text, book or teacher) – but over many years study scripture, praying with honesty, learning from others, facing tensions, and seeking God. And I would say the same for many of the elders – and many of us.

This is something that I've wrestled through over years, and still do, because the stakes are so high. (*And I hope you will to*).

I **grew up** in an environment where all the people up front at church were **men** (except for "special music", or a visiting missionary), and women only

played supportive roles. And if they did lead, it was only leading women, children or youth.

This was the perspective taught from the pulpit (though not often), but definitely assumed by the culture—and it seemed to align with a plain reading of Paul's teaching.

I always would have affirmed women in ministry, but there were certain areas of ministry leadership (i.e. being an elder or a lead pastor) that I would have disagreed with and, at a gut-level, felt uncomfortable with – because of my reading of Scripture.

But over the years, particularly in my college years, I started to wrestle with this as I found myself face to face with or walking alongside of **godly Christian women**, young and old, who were so evidently **gifted by God for leadership** (gifted more than many men that I knew), women through whom God spoke and ministered and blessed the church. **But more than this**, women who (like me) sensed a clear **call** from God to pastoral leadership; that this is what they were *made for, gifted for and called to do*.

And so, for a while there, I wrestled with this, wanting to affirm them in pastoral leadership (especially when they seemed particularly gifted for it and sensed a call to it), but feeling **constrained by scripture** not to do so. *(Not that I would have discouraged them. I just probably would have avoided the subject.)*

But at a certain point, I realized that this tension in me had left me with **more confusion than answers**, and I started fervently studying the Bible on this—both Paul's teaching, as well as the whole of Scripture—seeking for God's perspectives to shape mine.

And as I did, I was humbled to learn that there were many godly and wise evangelical Christians – pastors, leaders and bible scholars – who are wholeheartedly committed to biblical authority, and yet who came to a **different** conclusion than I had been taught.

Which alone did not change my mind, but did cause me to humbly come again to Scripture, and bow before God...

And as I did, over the course of a number of years, God challenged my previous convictions, opened my mind to aspects of the biblical witness that I had not taken to heart, shifted my understanding, and changed my gut-level sense of what is right, to the extent that I now say with confidence that, interpreted in context, **the gospel of Jesus Christ** (as revealed in the Old and New Testament) **opens the door for women and men to participate together as equal partners in life and leadership**. And not just *opens the door*, but *invites us to do so* – for God's glory, for the sake of the world, and for our joy in Him.

And I pray that our study of Scripture today – and in the coming days – will help us all see and celebrate this together...

**Lastly**, in the midst of all that I'm about to teach, I want to **explicitly affirm** today that there are many godly and wise, Christ-honoring women and men, families and churches, who read scripture very differently than myself and many of us on this, and who's lives and marriages, families and churches **are alive with the beauty of Jesus Christ**.

My convictions on how to interpret what Scripture teaches on this matter in no way lead me to desire to **disregard, despise or shame** the convictions of another lived out in the Spirit of Jesus. I know many Christians – men and women – who are convinced that God's good design for humanity is for Christ-honoring male leadership – and who live this out in ways that are truly beautiful and glorifying to God. May my words today and our journey in the coming days, never dishonor or malign the devotion of another to Christ. As Paul exhorts us in his letter to the Philippians, let us "*stand firm in the one Spirit, striving **together** as one for the faith of the gospel...*" (Phil 1:27).

With that, **let's pray...**

**So, where do we begin?**

In truth, **WHERE** we begin determines so much of where we will end up.

And I mean that. In fact that insight – one I learned from **Jill Briscoe** years ago, has been significant to my journey on this.

We often **begin** with one or more of Paul's specific teachings on the topic (which appear to close the door to women exercising any authority, teaching and leadership in the church). But over the years, I've come to see that in order to rightly understand Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2 (and similarly 1 Corinthians 14) we need to hear **Paul in context** – in two ways: **One**, in the context of what the rest of the Biblical revelation says on this topic (including the example of Paul's ministry itself), and **two**, we need to hear Paul's teaching in its own historical and literary context (as we seek to do with all scripture).

And if we do this, I'm convinced that we will hear Paul's prohibitive texts very differently...

In truth, the witness of **Paul's own ministry** in relation to women has significantly influenced my change of perspective – but we'll get to that later.

Now, as it says in the bulletin – today is simply **part one**. I'd love to take us through everything today – but i would have to rush through too much at too cursory of a level that it would not help us as much as it should. So today's task will be to explore **the larger context of what the biblical narrative tells us** about God's vision for women – with just a few vital thoughts about 1 Tim 2 at the end – And next time (on the 23rd) we will come back for a thorough treatment of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. ***You won't want to miss that!***

First, we need to start at the beginning – with **the book of Genesis**. If we want to make sense of Paul's thoughts regarding women in leadership, we have to read his works against the backdrop of the Hebrew Scriptures that formed him.

[If you have a Bible with you, do your best to track with me this morning. Or at least, take note of what we cover...]

Now there are **three** things that are vital to notice in the Genesis creation account in reference to our conversation today. The first is that Adam and Eve are both created *in the image of God*, second, that Eve is described as Adam's *helper*, and third, that God says to Eve (in Genesis 3:16) that Adam will **rule** over her.

Let's look at each of these briefly.

First of all, we need to know that in the world of the Ancient Near East where the Genesis account was first given voice, *no creation story of any people* referred to **women** being *made in the image of God*. This was the **sole** privilege of the King or Pharaoh and their **male** heirs (remember the famed *King Tut – Tutankhamun – literally means, "in the image of Amon"*).

But here, according to **Genesis 1:27**, we're told,

*"So God created humanity in his own image, in the image of he created them, male and female he created them."*

Though we often don't realize it, the Bible begins with one of the most powerful statements about the glory of women – right alongside of men.

Women – along with men – are made in the image of God – which is not just a static reality, but an empowering reality – to bear God's influence in the world.

It is impossible to overestimate the significance of this news in Gen 1.

So what about this language used in Genesis 2, referring to Eve as

**Adam's helper?**

According to Genesis 2, after having created Adam, God said that it is not good for man to be alone, and set out to create a companion, an *other* for Adam. He had the animals, but, as v.20 says, "**no suitable helper was found**".

And so, God created Eve – a woman – to be Adam's *helper*.

Now this language "*helper*" could understandably suggest that Eve (and thus women) was intended to be Adam's *subordinate* or *servant* – something of a "junior assistant for the man" (as John Ortberg playfully suggests) – someone to help with the chores or even to do the chores for Adam. And by implication, Adam was to play the lead role in the relationship.

But, as many have pointed out, this Hebrew word translated as "*helper*" (*ezer*) is used 19 times in the Old Testament, **16** of which refer to **God as the helper**. And I don't think any of us would ever perceive God as *our* subordinate.

Yes, **He is our helper**, but *not our subordinate*.

And so, in regard to Eve, when we read this we shouldn't hear **servant** or **subordinate**. Yes, Eve complimented Adam, but we've no reason to see her as his subordinate. The text does not lead us there.

In fact, the text is explicit that God created Eve so that together she and Adam would experience **community**. Eve was created as Adam's ezer in response to God's assessment that "**it is not good for man to be alone.**" According to Genesis 1-2, God's design and desire with Adam and Eve was all about **community – oneness – a community of mutuals** – "made for each other and at one with each other" (as one theologian puts it).

*We need to keep this in mind as we move ahead in the biblical story.*

But now to the last point in **Genesis 3:16**, where we hear that **Adam will rule over her.**

This is often seen as **the starting point** for this whole discussion – as the first, explicit glimpse of God's design. But we need to keep in mind **where this verse comes in the flow of the story.**

Genesis 3:16 comes after the fall, after sin has come into the world. This statement comes in the context of **God's judgment** on Adam and Eve – "as a curse, not a command." (Stanley Grenz once wrote). **"Rather than being a prescription** of what is morally binding on all subsequent relationships, it is a **description** of the present reality of life after the fall."

As John Ortberg wisely states,

**"One gender holding power** over the other – *and he will rule over you* – was not God's plan laid out at the beginning of creation. It is clearly here a part of the *curse* – *just like pain in childbirth and alienation from labor.*"

In this verse, God is describing the **consequences** of their sin, not His **original intention**.

If we're looking for an insight into God's original intention, God's design for men and women, we need to look to **Genesis 1-2**.

And there we get **a very different picture**.

Because there, in Genesis 1-2, before the fall, there is **no division of labor or lines of hierarchy – except that they are both under God**. (I never forget how forcefully this hit me years ago). **In Genesis 1:28**, Adam and Eve are **together** called and commanded to *"be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it"*.

In the Garden of Creation, there was no division of labor. **No distinction of roles based on gender**. No call for Adam to lead and Eve to support.

That's **only introduced in Genesis 3 as a consequence of sin** – not as a **prescription** of God's desire going forward, but a **description** of what the curse would bring in our relationships, communities and families.

Which is **exactly** what we see throughout history and in our own day.

I appreciate how Scot McKnight distills this for us. He writes,

"If we read the Bible as Story, we begin all questions at the beginning, with Genesis 1–3. And if we begin here, the entire story is reshaped. We learn from these chapters that God created male and female as mutuals—made for each other—and they were at one with each another. They were made for an Eden-like world, which in the Bible's Story will be the Kingdom of God, but they preferred another world.

The fall distorted mutuality by turning women against men and men against women; oneness became otherness and rivalry for power. Here are the climactic, tragic words from Genesis 3:16: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." We read here a prediction of what life will be like for those living in otherness instead of oneness..."

He goes on,

"But the good news story of the Bible is that the broken creation eventually gives way to new creation; the dead can be reborn and re-created; instead of a war of wills there can be a unity of wills."

Reading Genesis 3:16 as divine prescription rather than prediction and description means God has willed women to be contrarians and men as dominators. This is far from the way of God in the Bible's Story: God's redemption means oneness and mutuality, not hierarchy and a war of wills...

The words of Genesis 3:16, to put the matter directly, are overcome in new creation."

(Blue Parakeet, Scot McKnight)

In the garden of creation, (before sin came into the world) men and women, Adam and Eve stood alongside each other as **equal partners** in life.

**Together** called to bring forth and raise children. **Together** called to cultivate and care for creation. **Together** called and commanded to **rule** under the ultimate rule of God...

*Do we see this? We need to...*

**We don't have time to linger** much in the Old Testament, except for a brief moment on **the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment** and a word about the spiritual authority of a prophetess named **Huldah**.

First, in **Exodus 20:12** – God commanded Israel – "**Honor your father and your mother.**" We talked about this in our series last year, that although we often don't notice the explosive power of this commandment, in the ANE, in the world of Exodus, where a command like this was spoken, it was **only ever** in reference to honoring one's **father**.

But just as the Genesis creation account declares that both men and women are created in the image of God, so here, YAHWEH, the rescuing God of Exodus, **commands** us to honor both our father **and our mother**. According to the God of Exodus, in Israel there was never to be heard the words, "*Go talk to your father*" – as though his words alone were to be heeded. No, in God's economy, both father and mother were equally to be listened to, honored and heeded. This was an explosive idea in the ancient world – and still is today in some parts of our world.

Now to the example of a lesser known prophet – named **Huldah** (2 Kings 22). We could talk about Miriam or Deborah, but Huldah is a story that needs to be told. A story I didn't know until recently.

We meet her in the account of the life of King Josiah – the King who's priests discover the book the Law – and upon hearing the reading of the Torah, Josiah is struck to the heart with grief and repentance for the nation of Israel.

And he needs wise counsel, an authoritative word to discern God's counsel and lead him forward in leading the nation.

But instead of calling on Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk (all prophets of his day – and available to him), he chooses to go to **Huldah**, the lone woman prophet (or prophetess) – in search of God's wisdom and direction for the nation.

And he embraced her counsel and called the nation back to righteousness.

*May God raise up more Huldah's in our day! And may we trust and embrace God's leadership in them...*

**All that to say** that in the Old Testament, we receive not only a vision of God's original design, and an explanation of why our world is as it is, but we are also given examples of women who, by the grace, calling and empowerment of God, *speak for God, lead the nation, discern scripture, and guide nations back to repentance.*

Ok, so we're going to **fast forward** now to the **New Testament**, and consider **the place and role of women in the life and ministry of Jesus**, our Lord.

Now, nowhere does Jesus speak **explicitly** about God's design for women, but *that does not mean that he is silent on the matter*. In reality, Jesus' life and ministry was **filled** with actions in reference to women that **speak so loudly** - that had such profound meaning and implications for his day (*and ours*). So much so that Jesus must have been regarded as a **radical** when it came to his view of women and their role in his kingdom community.

Again and again, his actions and words challenged, subverted and overturned the cultural assumptions and practices of his day (and ours) regarding women, their role in society, the church and their relationship to men.

First of all, and this seems absurd to say, but Jesus **spoke to women in public**. *Something a rabbi would never do*.

This seems insane to us, and utterly not worth mentioning – except that in Jesus' day, Jewish men did not speak to women (other than their wives or family members). Women were not considered full persons in society. They had no rights and privileges. They were the possession of their father or husband. But Jesus broke from this and spoke to women, counted women as friends, granting them the dignity of being full persons in society. By this action alone, Jesus confronted and rejected the culture's perspective on women.

But more than this, **Jesus had women disciples**. Again, *something no rabbi would do*. Mary Magdalene, Joanne (the wife of Herod's steward), Susanna, Salome, Mary and Martha and others are all at some point referred to as Jesus' disciples. This was unheard of.

Think about the story of **Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42** (we talked about this at length back in June). Jesus allowed Mary to sit at his feet along with the 12 and receive his teaching. [Only in recent years have the implications of this scene sunk in for me.] Because to "sit at the feet" of a rabbi was an explicit reference to becoming that rabbi's disciple. And Jesus didn't just quietly **allow** it to happen. He explicitly **affirmed** her choice to do this. He welcomed her as his disciple.

Which meant – **and this would have been shocking in his day** – that Jesus considered her (a woman) someone who would ultimately *teach others* about the kingdom of God. **Because disciples became teachers – rabbi's themselves.**

This was the goal of every rabbi-disciple relationship. It wasn't just to *learn* from the rabbi – one could do that in the synagogue. To be a disciple meant *to be on the path of training at the feet of a rabbi **to become a rabbi*** – to become a *teacher and leader in the rabbi's tradition*.

But even bolder than this, **Jesus allowed and sent women out to represent him to others, to men even; to be evangelists, to proclaim Him and**

**His gospel to others.** Think of the woman at the well, and how she ran off to tell the villagers about Jesus and what He'd done for her. He did not call out to her as she ran off, telling her to only share this with women and children. No, he gladly allowed her to be the bearer of the gospel to the men and women of her village.

Think about Jesus encountering Mary after His resurrection. He **chose** to reveal Himself to her before any others, and then he **chose** to send her off to proclaim to the others – to the men – that He was alive.

*We need to keep the radical example and ministry of Jesus in relation to women in our minds, when we come to interpret Paul's prohibitive texts...*

In truth, with the vision of Genesis 1 and 2 in our minds, is this not **exactly** what we've expect of Jesus and the gospel – **the reverse of the curse** – showing us *with his own life* what the life of the Kingdom looks like in regard to the relationships of men and women. **Women and men standing alongside one another as equal partners in life, ministry and leadership.**

By his actions and words, Jesus overthrew the culturally accepted perspectives on women's role in church and society, and **opened the door wide** for women in his kingdom community...

Ok, lastly, in this whirl-wind biblical survey, we come to consider **the place of women in the early church** (as witnessed to in the book of Acts and the New Testament letters—including the letters of **Paul himself**).

And the undeniable starting point must be Peter's **declaration on the Day** of Pentecost (Acts 2) that God was fulfilling his promises (quoting the prophet Joel – Joel 2:28-32)...

*"In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons **and 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 prophesy..."*

I love how Scot McKnight conveys the impact of this. He says,

**"Pentecost was the day the music of the fallen creation died, and the day new creation music began to be sung. It doesn't take but a lazy reading of Acts 2 to see that something big and something new was happening, and that bigness and that newness included women."**

To which let me add a comment from Gilbert Bilezikian (another Bible scholar). He says,

**"The meaning of this enablement was not only that the Spirit was giving them new powers to proclaim the gospel in all the world, but also and more importantly that the human race was again being united into one body... The divisions and the fragmentation's that had resulted from the fall were finally overcome in the new community. Eden was being reborn."** (123)

And integral to this, was a **Spirit-inspired increase** of the role of women in God's kingdom community, ***not a decrease***...

And although there are many that could be noted (Paul joyfully references **15** women in his letter to the Romans), there are **three women that stand out** in the records of the early church. One as a **teacher**, another as a **deacon** and still another as an **apostle** – all of whom the Apostle Paul celebrated and affirmed.

In Acts 18, we're told of the ministry couple, **Priscilla** and Aquila, who taught Apollos (a learned Christian man, a teacher) on some important aspects of Christian theology.

But in a clear break from first-century protocol, Priscilla's name is **always** referred to first, suggesting her prominence in the pair. There is no other reason their names would have been ordered this way. God had gifted her with understanding to teach and she used her gift to instruct Apollos (a Christian man). And at the conclusion to his letter to the Christians in Rome and in his second letter to Timothy, **Paul himself** sends greetings and speaks highly of the ministry of Priscilla and Aquila. (*We need to keep this in mind as we come to Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2*).

And in the conclusion to this same letter to the Romans (again note this is *Paul* writing), Paul commends a woman named **Phoebe** as a deacon and leader in the church. (Romans 16:1-2). He writes,

*"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me."*

She was a **deacon** in the church and a **benefactor** to many (including Paul). And Paul commends her for this.

Sadly many translators (guided not by interpreting principles, but by personal theological convictions—i.e. *that women cannot be leaders in the church*) have obscured this passage by translating it otherwise.

The word here is **diakonos**. Which normally (when referring to a man) is translated as *deacon*, but here a number of translations render it **servant**. It isn't wrong to translate *diakonas* as *servant*, but a translation needs to be consistent. Thankfully a few more recent translations have **corrected this**.

Similarly with the reference to her as "**a benefactor of many**". Some translations refer to her as "**a great help**". But again, this is misleading. Elsewhere in scripture, whenever referring to a man, this greek word (**prostatis**) is typically translated as **minister, benefactor, overseer or officer**.

Whichever word is chosen, the word conveys a position of **authority** and influence over others. And this is how **Paul** refers to Phoebe. But he doesn't just refer to her as this, **he commends her for her ministry and leadership**.

Lastly, in this same list of greetings (Romans 16:7), Paul refers to another woman, **Junia**, as an apostle! As "outstanding among the apostles", in fact.

He writes,

"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me."

Again in the last century, translators gave the masculine form of this name (**Junias**), but not for most of Christian history. In fact, **John Chrysostom**, the archbishop of Constantinople in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, wrote *in praise of Junia the female apostle*. But during the Protestant Reformation, due to theological convictions of translators (that women can't be leaders), **Junia became Junias**. Thankfully, translators all agree again that this is a feminine name—**Junia**.

Here, Paul himself again **affirms a woman** in a role of significant ministry leadership—as **an apostle in the church**. Not an apostle in the sense of the original 12, but as a gift & calling of unique leadership in pioneering ministry.

**All that to say**, in contrast to what many believe about the Apostle Paul's view of women, following the example of Jesus, *the book of Acts and the letters of Paul reveal Paul celebrating and affirming women again and again as his co-laborers in ministry, and doing so in considerable roles of ministry and teaching, influence and leadership.*

**Romans 16:1** – *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.*

**Romans 16:3** – *"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my **co-workers** in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them..."*

**Romans 16:7** – *"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was."*

If we are to faithfully interpret Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2 (and elsewhere), we need to do so with all that we've seen so far in mind.

*Simply put, in his life and ministry, Paul has set a precedent of embracing and affirming women as equal partners in ministry and leadership.*

With all this in mind, we finally come now to hear what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus – in **1 Timothy 2:11-15**,

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

***How are we to make sense of this?***

Here, the Apostle Paul clearly **prohibits women** from any role of teaching or leadership (at least not over men). ***How are we to make sense of this?***

Faced with this **massive discrepancy** between what we've seen elsewhere of Paul's own attitude toward women in ministry and leadership – and what we read here (and in a few other passages), we are left with three conclusions, I think. **(1)** That the bible is simply contradictory and not worth our time; **(2)** that we need to embrace one set of texts and lay aside the others, **or (3)** that we're missing some piece of the puzzle and as a result we've misunderstood what Paul is saying and what was going on in Timothy's church.

As I'm sure you're expecting, I'm convinced that the third option makes the most sense and honors God's revelation in Scripture – that we're **missing some piece of the puzzle and as a result we've misunderstood what Paul is saying.**

And one **major, undeniable clue** that points us toward this is Paul's explicit instruction that "**women will be saved through childbearing**". That is the plain reading of the text, is it not? Which **forces us** to acknowledge the reality that somethings going on here that we don't understand – because, as Paul himself teaches us in Ephesians, "**it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith**" – not through **child-bearing?!**

Clearly there is something unique that Paul is addressing in this letter – something we need to understand.

And the other piece that guides me in this is this simple conviction that *God is not schizophrenic*, and *neither is the Apostle Paul* (who wrote what we now embrace as Spirit-inspired Scripture).

So, let close with one core insight on this passage that has helped me make sense of what Paul says here – *and then on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, I will do a thorough teaching on this text.*

And it has to do with this undeniably significant statement that Paul does not permit a women to "assume authority" over a man.

Many read this as a reality rooted in God's creational design – that men are called to lead and rule, and women to submit, as unto Christ.

The Greek word – *authentein* – translated here as "assume authority" or "exercise authority" – didn't actually carry that meaning until the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Let me quote Darrell Johnson on this, because I don't think I can distill it any better than he does. He explains,

*Before the third century A.D., it did not have the meaning "exercise authority over."... The word meant "to thrust oneself", "to have full power over". It even meant "to commit murder". The nouns related to this verb mean "power" (authentia) and "master" (authentic).*

*[One Greek scholar] writes that this verb "clearly bears the nuance of using such absolute power in a destructive manner, describing the activity of a person who acts for his or her own advantage apart from any consideration of the needs or interests of anyone else." It is that kind of authority which Paul prohibited women in Ephesus from exercising. He denied women the privilege to teach in the church with that spirit."*

But note this – "**But he also denied such a privilege to men.** For Paul knew what Jesus said: (Mark 10:42-43) "You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their high officials **exercise authority** over them. Not so with you..." Paul prohibits the exercise of a certain kind of authority—the kind that seeks dominance over the other. (Darrell Johnson)

Paul rebukes the women in Ephesus for seeking this kind of dominance, *just as Jesus rebukes his male disciples for aspiring to the same.*

Clearly, there is far more for us to explore in this key text – which we will do so on the 23<sup>rd</sup> – but, for now, let me **say that I trust that Paul's words** here are inspired by the Spirit – and their meaning is not to ***silence women for all time*** or ***to prohibit them from leadership in the church*** – but to call women, like men, away from attempts to domineer the other, and for women, like men, ***to learn before seeking to teach*** – for the good of all. (More on this on the 23<sup>rd</sup>.)

The more I've come to know God through his revelation in the Bible and specifically in Jesus, and the more I learn about other religions, the more I have come to believe that **the gospel of Jesus Christ is truly good news for women.**

**May God grant us the grace to hear and follow Jesus into the fullness of**  
His good desires for all of us – for His glory, for the sake of the world, and for our joy in Him...

→ invitation to the Table