

Let the Women Keep Silent in the Churches

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We do not start our Christian lives by working out our faith for ourselves; it is mediated to us by Christian tradition, in the form of sermons, books and established patterns of church life and fellowship. **We read our Bibles in the light of what we have learned from these sources; we approach Scripture with minds already formed by the mass of accepted opinions and viewpoints with which we have come into contact, in both the Church and the world.** Inevitably, we grow up children of our own age, reflecting in our outlook the mental environment in which we were reared. The process is as natural as breathing in the air around us, and as unconscious. **It is easy to be unaware that it has happened; it is hard even to begin to realize how profoundly tradition in this sense has moulded us.** But we are forbidden to become enslaved to human tradition, either secular or Christian, whether it be ‘catholic’ tradition, or ‘critical’ tradition, or ‘ecumenical’ tradition, or even ‘evangelical’ tradition. We may never assume the complete rightness of our own established ways of thought and practice and excuse ourselves the duty of testing and reforming them by Scripture.¹ (Emphasis mine—bold)

¹ J. I. Packer, *“Fundamentalism” and the Word of God: Some Evangelical Principles* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1958), 69–70. **J. I. Packer** (1926–2020) is regarded as one of the most influential evangelicals in North America. He was Board of Governors’ Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and his writings include books such as *Knowing God*, *A Quest for*

God's Law versus the Oral Law

As we approach **First Corinthians 14:34-35**, we encounter a citation that, on surface reading, forbids women to preach or teach in the assembly of the saints, which gathering is normally called “church.” Paul wrote the following words: “Women should remain silent in the churches.” In other words, they are not allowed to speak [**σιγάτωσαν**, *sigatōsan*, “let be silent”].² I Corinthians 14 is cited to prove that women but must be in submission, as the **law** [**νόμος**, *nomos*] states. For instance, if they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak [**λαλεῖν**, *lalein*] in the church” (**14:34-35**, NIV, 1984). What “law” is involved? The word “**law**” is capitalized in the 1984 edition, but in the 2011 edition of the NIV, the word “**law**” is translated with a small “**l**,” not a capital “**L**.”

One of the key factors in interpreting the word “law” correctly is one’s failure to examine the context. This “**law**” is not the Old Testament “**Law**,” but rather the traditions of the religious leaders. It is the Oral law of Judaism. For an example, when Peter went to the home of Cornelius, he immediately reminded the Gentiles about the “oral” law of the Jews. Luke records the following remarks by Peter to Cornelius and those present:

He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against **our law** [law of Judaism, not God’s Law] for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?” (**Acts 10:28-29**)

Another example of the use of the word “**law**” is found in John’s story of Jesus healing a man at the pool (**John 5:1-8**). This particular healing took place on the Sabbath. After the healing took place, John records an encounter of the **Jewish leaders** with the man who was healed. This whole scenario focuses attention on this miracle and what Jesus told this man to do. John describes the reaction of the **Jewish leaders** toward the man who was healed this way:

Godliness, Growing in Christ (Crossway) and *Rediscovering Holiness*. He preached and lectured widely in Great Britain and North America and served as general editor of the English Standard Version of the Bible published in 2001, and theological editor of the Study Bible version. In 2014, Packer was named Author of the Year by the Association of Logos Bookstores. He was a frequent contributor to and an executive editor of *Christianity Today* and wrote numerous articles published in journals such as *Churchman*, *SouthWestern Journal*, *Reformation Revival Journal* and *Touchstone*. He received a BA, MA and PhD from Oxford University.

² **σιγάτωσαν** (*sigatōsan*), verb, present, active, imperative, third, person, plural. From **σιγάω** (*sigāō*): **to be silent or mute**

Then Jesus said to him, “**Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.**”⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,¹⁰ and so the **Jewish leaders** said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the **law** forbids you to carry your mat.” (5:8-10).

What law? Was it God’s **Law** or the **law** of the Jewish leaders? It was the “oral” law of the Jewish leaders, **NOT** God’s Law. What about the events that transpired concerning the Crucifixion of Jesus. The Jewish leaders reminded Pilate about their **own law** concerning Jesus’ Crucifixion. John recorded this conflict between the actions of Jesus and their “oral” law. We should listen in on this conversation as revealed by John:

The Jewish leaders insisted, “**We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.**”⁸ When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid,⁹ and he went back inside the palace. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.¹⁰ “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”¹¹ Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” (John 19:7-11)

In my research, I have not been able to locate this so-called law in the Hebrew Scriptures. Unfortunately, the **Jewish leaders**, as many Christians do today, seek to strengthen or reinforce their hand-me-down presuppositions. It is in this same vein that the Jewish leaders, apparently, alluded to **Leviticus (14:16)** in order to substantiate or justify their reaction to Jesus, which citation does not deal with Jesus’ assertion concerning Himself as the Son of God. This reference from Leviticus is lifted from its context. **When we interpret Scriptures in a vacuum, this mind-set can lead to an erroneous or invalid application.** The following observation by **Andreas J. Köstenberger** is extremely helpful in seeking to recognize how the religious leaders misused the Scriptures to bolster their aim to kill Jesus.

“**We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.**” A Roman prefect was responsible both for keeping peace and maintaining local law. Jesus has frequently been accused of blasphemy (5:18; 8:59; 10:31, 33); **yet in both the OT and other Jewish literature, the claim of being God’s son need not be blasphemous and may refer to the anointed king of Israel (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7; 89:26-27) or to the Messiah (4QFlor: see commentary at 1:49;**

Michel, NIDNTT [*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* 3:637].³

The following commentary by **D. A. Carson**⁴ is also helpful in unraveling the Jewish leaders' misinterpretation of the Scriptures in order to support their clandestine scheme to rid themselves of Jesus. Once more, Carson's insights help us to focus in on the motives of the religious leaders:

The language of the Jewish officials, 'he claimed to be *the Son of God*', almost sounds as if the claim itself was sufficient to presume guilt of blasphemy. In many contexts that was demonstrably untrue. The anointed king of Israel was sometimes referred to as God's Son in the Old Testament (Pss. 2:7; 89:26–27), and in some intertestamental sources 'Son of God' is parallel to 'Messiah' (4Q *Florilegium*; cf. notes on 1:49; NIDNTT 3. 637). But Jesus' opponents rightly recognize that as he uses the title there are overtones not only of messiahship but of sharing the rights and authority of God himself (cf. 1:34; 5:19–30).⁵

³ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 533-534. NIDNTT C. Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vols.1–4 (Paternoster, 1975–78). **Andreas J. Köstenberger** (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is senior research professor of New Testament and biblical theology and director of PhD studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author or coauthor of several books, including *Encountering the Gospel of John*, *The Book Study Concordance of the Greek New Testament*, and *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel*. He also translated Adolf Schlatter's two-volume *New Testament Theology*, and editor of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.

⁴ **D.A. Carson** (b. 1946) is one of the most respected New Testament scholars in the world. A respected teacher, author, and speaker, he is currently research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and the president of The Gospel Coalition. He has served as pastor of Richmond Baptist Church and as the first dean of the seminary of Northwest Baptist Theological College, now known as Northwest Baptist Seminary. Logos has collected his sermons—including audio—in the D.A. Carson Sermon Archive.

Carson lectures in academic and church settings around the world, and is the author of more than 50 books, including *Exegetical Fallacies*, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to John*, *The Gagging of God*, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of I Corinthians 12–14* and the *Intolerance of Tolerance*. He is the editor of the Pillar New Testament Commentary series, and coedited of the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* with G.K. Beale, and the *Studies in New Testament Greek* series with Stanley Porter. You can find more of Carson's work in the Baker D.A. Carson Collection (15 vols.).

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 599. **D. A. Carson** (Ph.D., University of Cambridge) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is author or editor of numerous books.

Another example of the Jew’s “oral” law is found in Acts 21:28-29 in which Paul was accused of breaking their “oral” law concerning the Temple and the Gentiles. Luke chronicles the following incident concerning **Paul** and **Trophimus** (trōf’ī-mūs, a Gentile):

When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere **against our people and our law** and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” (Acts 21:27-28)

The above citation from Luke’s writings lets us know that he is dealing with Herod’s Temple, not the Temple that God had ordained. In this “Temple,” you have the **court of the Gentiles**, the **court of the Women**, and the **court of the men**. This so-called “law” had to do with the “oral” law of the Jews, NOT God’s Law. The following remarks by **Darrell L. Bock**⁶ are extremely helpful in understanding what took place concerning Paul and his co-worker (Trophimus):

Gentiles were not allowed into the main temple area (*m. Mid.* 2.3; Josephus, *Ant.* 15.11.5 §417 [notes that a Gentile who entered was subject to death]; *J.W.* 5.5.2 §§193–94; 6.2.4 §§124–25; *m. Kelim* 1.8; *b. ‘Erub.* 104b). **Four-and-a-half-foot tall stone markers inscribed in Greek and Latin in the outer court that surrounded the Court of Women announced to foreigners that they were prohibited from**

⁶ **Dr. Darrell L. Bock**, research professor of New Testament studies and professor of spiritual development and culture at Dallas Theological Seminary, serves as editor-at-large for *Christianity Today*, and is on the board of Chosen People Ministries and Wheaton College. From 2000 to 2001, Dr. Bock served as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. He has earned international recognition as a Humboldt Scholar for his work in Luke-Acts, historical Jesus study, biblical theology, as well as with messianic Jewish ministries. He has published articles in the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Dallas Morning News* and is a well-known author of over 30 books. His publications include *Studying the Historical Jesus: A Guide to Sources and Methods*, *Jesus According to Scripture*, an NIV Application Commentary on Luke, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, and commentaries on Acts and Luke in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) series.

m. Mishnah
Mid. Middot
Ant. Jewish Antiquities
J.W. Jewish War
m. Mishnah
Kelim Kelim
b. Babylonian Talmud
‘Erub. ‘Erubin

entering the sanctuary (Wikenhauser 1961: 242). Two of these notices have been found. They read, “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. **Anyone who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death**” (Bruce 1988a: 409). Four concentric rectangular inner courts of the temple precincts were for Jews, with restriction tightened as one moved inward. Gentiles were permitted in an outer court, outside the fourth court, the one for women. **The four inner courts were the courts of women**, then men, then the holy place for priests, **and** finally the holy of holies, where access was most restricted: only the high priest could enter just once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Polhill 1992: 452).

The “**oral**” law of the Pharisees and Sadducees represented the “**traditions**” of the religious leaders. The traditions were as binding upon the people as God’s Law. In fact, the “**oral**” law sought ways to circumvent God’s Law. An example is recorded by Matthew in his Gospel. Just a casual reading of Matthew’s Gospel reveals that his book is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders (see the Sermon on the Mount—**Matthew 5:20**). A classic illustration of this battle is found in Matthew’s Gospel. He pens an event that occurred between Jesus and the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. We should read and reread the following encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ²“**Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?** They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” ³Jesus replied, “**And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?**” ⁴For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ ⁵But **you say** that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is ‘devoted to God,’ ⁶they are not to ‘honor their father or mother’ with it. **Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.**[*παράδοσις, paradosis*] ⁷You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (**Matthew 15:1-8**)

The theological presuppositions of the religious leaders took superiority over the Word of God. Even today, our **inherited traditions** take priority over the Scriptures. John the Baptist’s ministry began with the castigation of the Pharisees and Sadducees (**Matthew 3:7-10**). Jesus, too, began His ministry in Galilee with His criticism of the religious leaders (**5:17-20**). Beginning with **5:21** and ending with **7:29**, Jesus makes a distinction between God’s Way and the way of the Pharisees and Sadducees. His Sermon on the Mount is a distinguishing specimen of the religiosity of the leaders in Israel.

Approximately twelve years after Paul’s conversion to Christianity, he wrote to the congregations of Galatia (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) about his zeal for the **traditions of his fathers**. In his letter to the Galatians, he

penned the following words that explains what was also going on in his Epistle to the Corinthians concerning the role of women in the Christian community:

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was **extremely zealous** for the **traditions** of my fathers [*πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων*, *patrikōn mou paradoseōn*, “my ancestral traditions”]. (Galatians 1:13-14)

First Corinthians 14:34 versus 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

If one’s interpretation of **First Corinthians 14:34** contradicts **11:1-16** as well as the **whole of Chapter 14**, then Paul contradicts the whole of God’s written Revelation. The NIV translates **14:34** this way: “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the **law** says” (**1 Corinthians 14:34**). This citation is **not** found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the 1984 edition of the NIV, the translators capitalized the word **Law** in **14:34**. Yet, in the 2011 edition of the NIV, the translators used a small “l” in the word “law.” **1 Corinthians 14:34** is a part of Paul’s “ancestral traditions,” not the Word of God. **Verse 34** dealt with the “oral” law of the religious leaders. In verse 36, Paul rebukes the Jewish leaders’ traditions by asking a question: “Did the word of God originate with you?” Prior to **14:34**, Paul told the Corinthians: “For you can **all** [both men and women] **prophecy** [*πάντες προφητεύειν*, *pantes prophēteuein*] in turn so that **everyone** may be instructed and encouraged.”

Even though the adjective is “masculine,” nevertheless, the context can include both male and female. For instance, the following remarks by Ray Summers illustrates that the context determines whether both male and female may be included:

The declension of *πᾶς*, *πᾶσα*, *πᾶν* follows the third declension in masculine and neuter and the first declension in the feminine. The main ways to use *πᾶς* are the following:

- Predicate position with a noun: *πᾶσα ἡ πόλις* (all the city).
- Attributive position with a noun: *ἡ πᾶσα πόλις* (the **whole** city).
- With a singular anarthrous noun: *πᾶσα πόλις* (**every** city).
- Predicate position with a participle: *πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων* (**everyone** who believes).⁷

⁷ Ray Summers and Thomas Sawyer, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, Rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 142. (Revised by Thomas Sawyer)

If women in the early stages of Christianity were not engaged in preaching the Gospel and teaching, we wonder why Paul, prior to his conversion, wrote about his animosity toward both **men** and **women** in his zeal to obliterate both sexes for their faith and work in God's kingdom. Luke penned the following words about Paul's vengeance against both **men** and **women**"

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether **men or women**, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2, see also 22:3-16; 26:9-18)

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, apparently, he sent this Epistle by Phoebe (fē'bē). In this Communication, he referred to Phoebe as a "**minster**" of the congregation in Cenchreae (**Romans 16:1**). Unfortunately, the NIV as well as other translations render the Greek word **διάκονος** (*diakonos*, "minister") as "servant" or "deacon." A more accurate translation reads: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **minister** of the church in Cenchreae." When Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae, he referred to Epaphras (ēp'ā-frās) as a "**fellow servant and minister**." When this word **διάκονος** is employed to Phoebe, the translators translate the Greek word as "**deacon**." On the other hand, when it is used in reference to men, as a whole, it is almost always translated as "minister." Why? The following citation is from **Colossians 1:7**: "You learned it from Epaphras, our dear **fellow servant** [**σύνδουλος**, *syndoulos*], who is a faithful **minister** [**διάκονος**, *diakonos*] of Christ on our behalf" (NIV 2011).

Again, in this same Epistle, Paul writes: "If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the **hope** held out in the gospel. "This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a **servant**" [**διάκονος** (*diakonos*, "minister")] (**1:23**). When this Greek word is translated as "deacon," I suspect that this reading is bias toward women ministers. In this verse, the scholars translated the Greek word as "**servant**" rather than "**minister**."

The Greek word for servant or slave is **δοῦλος** (*doulos*). Of the twenty-six persons mentioned in Romans 16, ten are women. In Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, he mentioned her name along with Apollos (ā-pōl'ōs) as ministers of God. The NIV translates **1 Corinthians 3:5** this way: "What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? **Only servants** [**διάκονοι**, *diakonoi*, "ministers], through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task." Once more, Paul, in his Letter to the Ephesians (**6:21**), spoke of Tychicus (tīk'ī-kūs) as a faithful **minister**; yet, the NIV substituted the word "servant" rather than "minister"

(διάκονος, *diakonos*). Both men and women are mentioned in the New Testament writings as “ministers.”

It is not uncommon for translations to translate the Greek word *diakonos* as “deacon.” **Earle E. Ellis** is on target when he calls attention to this flaw among some scholars:

The English translation ‘deacon’ (also in Phil 1:1) is, therefore quite misleading.... When the designations given to Paul’s associates are collated one is struck by the absence of certain terms, not only those later to become traditional for leaders in the Church but also many terms identified with the spiritual gifts or charism [‘kar-,i-zəm] specified by Paul. In his letter no colleague is called prophet, teacher, or pastor nor, let alone elder or bishop. The much used designations are, in descending frequency, **συνεργός** (*synergos*), **ἀδελφός** (*adelphos*), **διάκονος** (*diakonos*), and **ἀπόστολος** (*apostolos*). Interpreted within their Pauline context, they give an insight into the functions of Paul’s associates and consequently, into the form and strategy of his mission.⁸

When this Greek word (**διάκονος**, (*diakonos*) is translated as “deacon,” we are aware that this translation is simply an ecclesiastical modern-day usage. The same is true with the word “elder” and “bishop. When the translators translate the Greek word *diakonos* as “deacon” is somewhat deceptive.

Reading Backwards

The traditional interpretation of **1 Corinthian 14:34** contradicts **Chapter 11** of **First Corinthians** as well as the Hebrew Scriptures as a whole. The statement in **14:34** is not found one time in the Old Testament writings nor the New Testament writings as God’s Law. Paul simply called attention to **ancestral traditions**, that is to say, **Jewish traditions** (see **Galatians 1:14**). The traditional interpretation, among many Christians, is devoid of the biblical context. This particular citation (**14:34**) is simply a reading of the **inherited traditions** from the modern-day reading of the text, not the first-century reading. Much of our theology today is determined by the predispositions of each distinctive body of believers. Unfortunately, many Christians read the Scriptures without consideration of the culture behind the text. In other words, we study the Scriptures in a vacuum.

⁸ E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy & Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1993), 9, 5-6. **E. Earle Ellis** (1926-2010) was Research Professor of Theology Emeritus and Scholar in Residence at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Some of his other major publications include: *The World of St. John*, *The Making of the New Testament Documents*, *Christ and the Future in New Testament History*, and *History and Interpretation in New Testament Perspective*.

Proof-texting limits our interpretation. In other words, **our traditions** shape our reading of the text. Hopefully, this essay will enable us to overcome our biblical illiteracy. **As a whole we read the Bible from within our cherished hand-me-down inbred traditions.**

The Old Testament teaches us how to read the Gospels and the Epistles. **We should read or use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament, not the reverse.** In the early church (God’s New Community of believers), God’s people had to read the Scriptures backwards; they did not have New Testament documents for several years later.⁹ Luke records Paul’s methodology of teaching and preaching. We should listen and weight carefully Paul’s practice of preaching and teaching in the synagogue in Thessalonica:

When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis [ām-fīp’ō-līs] and Apollonia [āp’ō-lō-nī-ā], they came to Thessalonica [thēs’ā-lō-nī-kā], where there was a Jewish synagogue. ²As was his custom, **Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures** [the Hebrew Scriptures], ³explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said. ⁴Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and **quite a few prominent women.** (Acts 17:1-4)

This citation is an example of what it means to begin our studies from the Old Testament in order to begin our later interpretation of New Testament documents. The Gospels and the Epistles of Paul are saturated with the Old Testament citations in proclaiming the Gospel that God had promised originally to Adam and Eve (**Genesis 3:15**) and later to Abraham and his descendants (**Galatians 3:16-18; 4:30**). **As we continue to unravel the role of women within the Christian community, we are hampered with a “regulated reading” that we have inherited from our unique “tribe” (denomination) of believers.** This defective way of reading the text limits our interpretation.

Unfortunately, our hand-me-down traditions shape our reading of the text correctly. As we continue to examine our views about women in the church, we should not begin with the New Testament but with the Old Testament. In other words, **we should use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament, NOT the reverse.** To set the stage for a proper interpretation of the role of women in the Christian community, we are using the Old Testament to interpret the New

⁹ See **Richard B. Hays**, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014). See also, **Samuel G. Dawson**, *The Resurrection: Israel’s Old Testament Hope in Chronological Order* (Bowie, Texas: SGD Press, 2018). Both authors advance the need to use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament.

Testament. Our first example is from the Book of Joel (835 BC). We should recall that the only Bible that the early Christians had for about thirteen years was the Hebrew Scriptures. **When Paul preached to the Bereans, as stated above, the Bereans searched the Old Testament daily to see if Paul was correct in his preaching and teaching.** The following is Luke's account of Paul's ministry among the Bereans:

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹**Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures [Hebrew Scriptures] every day to see if what Paul said was true.** ¹² As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. (**Acts 17:10-12**)

As stated above, a classic example of using the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament is found in **Joel 2:28-32**. We should read and reread what Joel said would occur in the “**last days**” of apostle Israel and the beginning of God's New Community of believers (see also **Hebrews 8:13**):

And afterward [“**last days**”], I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your **sons and daughters will prophesy**, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹**Even on my servants, both men and women,** I will pour out my Spirit **in those days** [the last days of the Old Covenant world of Judaism]. ³⁰I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ³¹The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. ³²And **everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved**; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. (**Joel 2:28-32; see also Matthew 24:29-35**)

Within God's Messianic kingdom, we are informed that both “**men and women**” would be engaged in preaching and teaching God's Word. Again, Joel, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold that in the **last days** of the Old Covenant world of Judaism that both “sons” and “daughters” would prophesy. Just a little over eight-hundred years later, **on the Day of Pentecost**, both **men and women** prophesied (**Acts 2**). When the multitude witnessed this phenomenon of both men and women, Peter responded by saying:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! ¹⁶**No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:** ¹⁷“**In the last days** [Mosaic Age], God says, **I will pour out my Spirit on all people.** Your **sons** and

daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ **Even on my servants, both men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And **everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ (Acts 2:14-21; see also Matthew 24:29-35)

About twenty-two years after the Day of Pentecost, (AD 33 plus 22 additional years = AD 55), Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth about AD 55. In this Epistle, he upheld Joel’s prediction by stating that both **men** and **women** could prophesy in the assembly of the saints. (1 Corinthians 11:2-16). Also, the whole of the fourteenth Chapter of First Corinthians supports Joel’s foreshadowing the Messianic Age. Paul penned the following commentary on Joel’s prophecy: “For you can **all** (**πάντες**, *pantes*, “male and female”) prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (14:31). This citation upholds Acts 2 as well as 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. As noted above, the wording in 14:34 had to do with the **Jewish leaders’ traditions (oral law)**, not God’s Word. The traditional interpretation of 14:34 (women cannot speak in the church) would contradict both the Old and New Testament writings. **The Old Testament teaches us how to read and interpret the New Testament.**

The Hebrew Scriptures versus Traditions

How should we interpret the words in First Corinthians 14:34? The text reads: “Some should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says.” Have we observed Paul’s statement “**as the law says**”? Again, this statement is not found in the Hebrew Bible. Paul asked the following words concerning his citation from Jewish tradition: “Did the “Word of God originate with you” (14:35)? Paul did **not** say that “**it is written**” in the **Law**! An example of “**It is written**” is found in 1 Corinthians 9. In this chapter, Paul defends the need for financial support for those who devote their lives to the preaching and teaching God’s Word. He based his argument for support from the Scriptures. We should listen carefully to Paul’s argument concerning “**It is written**”:

Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk? ⁸ Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn’t the Law say the same thing? ⁹ For **it is written in the Law of Moses**: “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.” Is it about oxen that God is concerned? ¹⁰ Surely he says this for us, doesn’t he? Yes, **this was written for us**, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the

hope of sharing in the harvest. ¹¹ **If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?** ¹² If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. (**1 Corinthians 9:7-12**).

A classic example of **traditions** versus **God's written Revelation** (the Law) is found in Matthew's Gospel between Jesus and the **religious leader's** "oral law," **not** God's Law. Matthew writes:

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ² "**Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders?** They don't wash their hands before they eat!" ³ Jesus replied, "**And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?**" ⁴ For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' ⁵ **But you say** that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is 'devoted to God,' ⁶ they are not to 'honor their father or mother' with it. Thus **you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.** ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸ "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.'" (**Matthew 15:1-9**)

The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and **the religious leaders**.¹⁰ Both John the Immerser and Jesus the Messiah began their ministries with a denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees (**Matthew 3:7-10; 5:20**). In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He contrasted His teaching with that of the **religious leaders (5:21-7:28)**. He began His distinction between the "oral law" of the religious leaders with God's Law. For example, Jesus said "You have heard that it was said to the people of long ago" ("**oral law**"), but He then gave a true interpretation of God's Law with "**But I tell you**" (God's Word. **5:21-22**). Prior to this encounter, Matthew records Jesus' encounter with Satan. When Satan cited the Scriptures to Jesus, he did not cite the Scriptures in context. On the other hand, Jesus reminded Satan that "**It is written**" (**5:4**; cited from **Deuteronomy 8:3**). Scripture does not contradict Scripture. Beginning with **Matthew 5:21** and ending with **7:28**, Jesus makes a **distinction** between the "**oral laws or inherited traditions**" of the religious leaders versus "God's Law."

¹⁰ For an exhaustive study of this subject, I suggest the following dissertations: **Mark Allan Powell**, "The Religious Leader in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," Ph. D. Dissertation, A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, 1988, 264 pages. See also, **Robert Dallas Burdette**, "False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew." A Doctor of Ministry presented to the Faculty of Erskine Theological Seminary, 1999, 326 pages.

The traditional interpretation of **1 Corinthians 14:34** is not found in the Hebrew Bible. To illustrate, we will call attention to some well-known women in the **Hebrew Bible that nullifies the traditional interpretation of 14:34** as biblical Law for the Christian community in the twenty-first century. First of all, the Christian community that is now referred to as the “church” came into existence in AD 33 (**Acts 2**).¹¹ With the coming of Christ, we have an already-but-not-yet fulfillment of God’s Messianic Age (AD 70, see **Daniel 12:1-7; Revelation 11**), which we call the “body” of Christ (**Ephesians 4:1-6**). Did God use women to play or shoulder important positions in the guidance of the nation of Israel? The answer is yes! For instance, **Deborah, Huldah, and Miriam** were prophets during the time of the Mosaic Age. Once more, we need to remember that **we should use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament, NOT the reverse**. Following a few references to women in the Old Testament, we will turn our attention to the **role of women in the Christian community as revealed in the Book of Philippians**.

Deborah: A Prophet

Remember, in our study or investigation of the role of women in the Christian community, **we need to use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament**. One example is found in the Book of Judges, which Book covers 335 years of Israel’s history (1385-1050 BC). In **Chapters 4 and 5 of Judges**, the author records the story of **Deborah as a prophet** to the nation of Israel. The following quotation from **Judges 4:1-7** sets the stage for establishing the role of women in the Nation of Israel. **Yes, God used a woman to deliver Israel**. The author of Judges writes:

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that **Ehud** [ē’hūd] was dead.² So the LORD sold them into the hands of **Jabin** [jā’bīn] king of Canaan, who reigned in **Hazor** [hā’zôr]. **Sisera** [sīs’êr-à], the commander of his army, was based in **Harosheth Haggoyim** [hā-rō’shēth hă-gōyīm].³ Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, **they cried to**

¹¹ Our English word “church” is to “churchy” for the Greek word ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), which meaning is “a gathering of people summoned or called together.” In the twenty-first century, it is not uncommon for Christians to identify the word *ekklēsia* as a “church building.” Perhaps, another translation of the Greek word takes its meaning out of the denominational terminology to the gathering of God’s people. In other words, identifying God’s people as “Jesus groups” separates the meaning from, a church building. For instance, this Greek word simply identifies “**early gatherings of Christ believers**.” In the book of Acts (16:11-15), we witness the conversion of the household of Lydia who became members of the Jesus group (followers of Christ).

the LORD for help. ⁴Now **Deborah** [děb'ō-rà] a **prophet**, the wife of **Lappidoth** [lăp'ĩ-dōth], was leading Israel at that time. ⁵She held court under the Palm of **Deborah** between **Ramah** [rā'má] and Bethel [bēth'ěl] in the hill country of **Ephraim** [ē'frâ-īm], and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶She sent for **Barak** [bâr'āk] son of **Abinoam** [â-bĩn'ō-ām] from **Kedesh** [kē'dēsh] in **Naphtali** [năf'tâ-lī] and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali [năf'tâ-lī] and **Zebulun** [zēb'ū-lūn] and lead them up to Mount **Tabor** [tā'bêr]. ⁷I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the **Kishon** [kĩsh'ōn] River and give him into your hands.”

Philip B. Payne’s book (*The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood*) should be read by everyone who is seeking to understand the role of women within the Christians community more accurately. This book is a condensed version of his *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (511 pages, published in 2009). His comments about Deborah’s role in Israel is insightful:

Notice that there is no suggestion whatsoever in the text that there is anything amiss because this judge, Deborah (děb'ō-rà), is a woman or that she has any obligation to defer to her husband. **She is simply the leader of Israel, and people come to her for judgment.** Furthermore, she, a wife and mother (5:7), has authority to command Barak (bâr'āk), Israel’s military commander, “Go” (4:6, 14), which results in their successful defeat of Jabin’s army (jā'bĩn). They work so well together, he as military commander and she as commander in chief, that Hebrews 11’s celebration of heroes of the faith includes Barak (**Hebrews 11:32-34**).¹²

The following reference from **Pamela L. McQuade** concerning Deborah’s role as prophet in Israel is helpful in examining the leadership of women in Israel as revealed in the Old Testament. Her remarks about Deborah should cause each of us to go back to the Hebrew Scriptures. Again, **we need to use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament and never the reverse.**¹³ We should listen carefully to Deborah’s position as leader in Israel as presented in **Judges (Chapter 4-5)**. The following commentary by McQuade on Deborah is informative:

¹²Payne, Philip Barton, *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood: How God's Word Consistently Affirms Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023), 14.

¹³ See Samuel Dawson, *The Resurrection: Israel’s Old Testament Hope: Israel’s Old Testament Hop in Chronological Order* (Bowie, Texas: SGD Press, 2018), 6. He expresses the traditional method of the study of the Scriptures as a whole this way: “We use the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament, not the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament.” Once more, I highly recommend his book on *The Resurrection*. As well as Richard Hays book on *Reading Backwards*.

God doesn't explain Himself. **Suddenly, in a time when Israel has become unfaithful to the Lord, the scripture proclaims the position of Deborah, the only female to rule Israel during the years of the judges—that era between Joshua's death and Saul's accession as king. Deborah was not just a minor judge;** she was an authoritative woman who decided disputes between men and held the power common to all Israel's judges. Nor was this a piece-of-cake leadership for Deborah. Israel had been subjugated by the Canaanite ruler Jabin of Hazor, yet the Israelites never brought an army against him until this woman was in charge. **Deborah became the answer to the prayer for help her people sent up to God as they saw the Canaanite commander Sisera heading their direction followed by nine hundred chariots.**¹⁴ (Emphasis mine—bold)

Huldah: A Prophet

Hilkiah [hīl-kī'á] the priest, Ahikam [á-hī'kām], Akbor, Shaphan [shā'fān] and Asaiah [á-sā'yá] went to speak to the prophet Huldah [hūl'dá], who was the wife of Shallum [shāl'ūm] son of Tikvah [tik'vā], the son of Harhas [hār'hās], keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter. (2 Kings 22:14)

We should take notice, as stated above, that Huldah, the prophetess, lived during the reign of Josiah (641-609 BC) who became king of the southern kingdom. Josiah became king when he was eight years old and reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years (**2 Kings 22:1**). During the eighteenth year of his reign, the Book of the Law was found during the renovation of the Jerusalem temple (**22:8-20; 2 Chronicles 34:8-20**). When the Law was read, Josiah was shocked and tore his clothes. The fuller context is cited to assist in one's comprehension. For instance, the author of 2 Kings penned Josiah's reaction to their predicament:

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.¹² **He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan,** Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant:¹³ **“Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found.** Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.”¹⁴ **Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Akbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophet Huldah,** who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She **lived in Jerusalem,** in the New Quarter. (2 Kings **22:11-14**)

Israel had rebelled against God (**22:15-20**). Yet, in spite of the corruption, Josiah brings about major religious reforms and works to remove idol-worship in

¹² Pamela McQuade, *The Top 100 Women of the Bible* (Barbour Publishing, 2007), 40.

Judah. Ultimately God would send wrath against Israel for worshiping false gods. We do not have a great deal of information concerning her role as prophet in Israel. Nevertheless, **Huldah** lived, along with Jeremiah (627 BC) and Zephaniah (640 BC), during the reign of Josiah (641-609 BC) as a prophet of Israel. The following remarks by **Gilbert Bilezikian** (b.1927 @ 96) are informative concerning the prophets of Israel”

Although statistically the majority of the old covenant prophets were male, the Bible mentions several female prophets and describes them as exercising the same kind of authority in the religious sphere as their male counterparts (**Miriam, Deborah, Huldah**, etc.). The story of **Huldah** will suffice to illustrate our point.

Desiring to anticipate the fate of his nation, the reformist King Josiah commanded the high priest and several of his notables to inquire of the Lord on his behalf. **They could have gone to either Jeremiah or Zephaniah, both contemporaries of King Josiah. Instead they went to the prophet Huldah, herself the wife of a lower-rank temple officer.** She delivered to them a scathing denunciation of the religious corruption of the nation and a powerful prediction of doom that motivated the king to effect profound changes in the religious life of the people (2 Kings 22:11–23:25). Thus, **God used the spiritual leadership of a woman to convey his will to the king, to the high priest, and to her contemporaries so that she influenced the history of the whole nation**¹⁵

Miriam: A Prophet

Again, we are confronted with another woman who is described by Moses as a prophet. She was not only a prophet but also one of the leaders in Israel—**Moses, Aaron, and Miriam**. In Chapter 15 of the Book of Exodus, Moses recorded his song and the song of his sister (**Exodus 15:1-21**). In addition to this information, Moses penned the following words about his sister: “Then **Miriam the prophet**, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.²¹ **Miriam sang to them**: “Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.” (**15:20-21**). The prophet Micah (735 BC) penned the following words about Miriam: “I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent **Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam**. (Micah 6:4).

¹⁵ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says about a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 3rd Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 52. I highly recommend this volume. (Emphasis mine—bold and underlining)

Joel's Prophecy Fulfilled in the First Century

Repetition is one of the three basic rules of interpretation and learning. The three rules are (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition. We need to guard against the proclivity to read our own ideas into the text. Redundancy is sometimes viewed in a negative light. On the other hand, redundancy is a tool whereby entrenched traditions can be nullified. **As interpreters, we should not seek to impose our human traditions upon the text of God's Word. Atomistic handling of the text can result in corruption of the text's original meaning.** Relative isolation of a particular text from its context can result in *eisegesis* (reading into the text) rather than *exegeses* (drawing out of the text). As we study God's words, **we need to remember that our minds are full of spiritual cobwebs that we have inherited from our preachers and teachers in the pulpit.** For example, we often read the Bible within our own interpretative community, that is to say, our own unique "tribe" of fellowship. **Aimee Byrd** is right on target when she writes:

We know how to identify obvious sinful behaviors stemming from the sexual revolution and keep them out of the church. **But can we identify the yellow wallpaper that has been in the background all along? Can we remove it? Do we let the Bible that is in plain sight guide us all?** What furniture do we keep and restore, and what needs to be cleared away? **Let's let Christ rearrange our furniture.** Let it be his house. Although, if we let him, he does more than rearrange—he completely takes over, transforms, and sanctifies. Just think of how merciful our God is, turning our sinful bodies into temples of his Holy Spirit. And this being the case, then God himself is the Lord of our souls. Who can separate us from his love?¹⁶ (Emphasis mine—bold and underlining)

Once more, has God changed His mind about the role of women within the Christian community (from AD 33 to the present)? All over again, I wish to nail-the-point-home about how to read the Scriptures in context: **we need to use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament.** A classic example, as stated earlier in this essay, of the role of women in the Messianic Age is found in the Book of Joel (835 BC) concerning the passing away of the Old Covenant World of Judaism in AD. 70. By the Holy Spirit, Joel (835 BC) pointed out that in the "**Last Days**" of Israel that God would pour out His spirit upon **both male and female.** The words of Joel should capture our attention concerning both men and women involved in proclaiming the Word of God. We should open our eyes and our ears to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying through His prophet Joel.

¹⁶ Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 24.

And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on **all people**. Your **sons and daughters** will prophesy, your **old men** will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ **Even on my servants, both men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. ³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ³¹ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. ³² And **everyone** who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:28-32)

“**And afterward**” is equivalent to the “**last days**,” which “**last days**” had to do with the passing away of the Mosaic Age and the bringing in of the New Age (Messianic Age). The author of the Book of Hebrews expressed it this way: “By calling this covenant “new,” he has **made the first one obsolete**; and what is **obsolete** and **outdated** will **soon** [ἐγγύς, *engys*] disappear” (Hebrews 8:13). We should never forget that one of the basic principles of interpretation is **to use the Old Testament to interpret the New Testament**. On the Day of Pentecost (AD 33), Peter cited from **Joel 2:28-32** as the fulfillment of what Joel predicted would happen in the future, which Peter identified as that which Joel foretold would occur (Acts 2:14-21).

Paul (AD 55) wrote to the Corinthians concerning both men’s and women’s activity in the assembly. Just a casual reading of the text reveals that both men and women could pray and prophesy in the gathering of the saints (1 Corinthians 11:4-5). In addition to 11:4-5, **Paul also approved of both men and women taking part in their meetings, which comments also validates Paul’s earlier remarks about women in the assembly** (see comments on 1 Corinthians 14 above—pages 7 and 10). In order to grasp the significance of Joel’s prophecy, we need to read and reread Peter’s remarks wherein he unravels Joel’s prediction:

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. ¹⁵ These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! ¹⁶ No, **this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel**: ¹⁷ “**In the last days** [ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, *en tais eschatais hēmerais*], God says, **I will pour out my Spirit on all [Jews and Gentiles—men and women] people**. Your **sons and daughters** will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even on my servants, both men and women, **I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy**. ¹⁹ I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. ²⁰ The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. ²¹ And **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**’ (Acts 2:14-21)

The Background of Paul's Epistle to the Christians in Philippi

The first person to respond to Paul's teaching about the Christ was a woman named (Lydia) in Philippi. Prior to this episode, Paul received a revelation from God to go to Macedonia. Paul, Silas, and Timothy (**Acts 16:1-5**) left for this mission field by ship. Upon landing, they travelled to Macedonia (a Roman colony and a leading district of Macedonia). Apparently, there was no synagogue in this area since it required ten Jewish men. As a result of no synagogue, Paul learned of a "place of prayer." (**16:13-15**). This text does not indicate that men were present in their gathering. Luke records this incident:

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. **We sat down and began to speak to the women** who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. **She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.** ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. (**Acts 16:13-15**)

As a result of this conversion of Lydia and her household, we witness the first congregation in the home of Lydia and her household. **Was she allowed to talk about Jesus in her home when others became a part of this fellowship of believers?** Or, was she told to keep her mouth shut in their gatherings? Since God opened her heart to Paul's message about Jesus, we cannot help but wonder why God would then place a restriction on her involvement in the assembly of God's saints—both women and men—for evangelistic activities. There is not a hint that women were forbidden to speak in their gatherings. The second major character that accepted the Gospel was the Philippian jailor (**16:16-34**).

Luke shared that Paul and Silas spoke the Word of the Lord (the Gospel) to him and his household. The **Word of the Lord** was about **Jesus** as God's Good News of salvation, **not** about a worship service with five ritualistic acts that has to be performed in a distinctive way, otherwise one's worship is in vain.¹⁷ Paul wrote this Epistle about AD 62 while in prison in Rome. **This Letter endorses the active role of women within the congregation.** The language of this Epistle upholds women as ministers within this local fellowship of God's saints. Moisés Silva¹⁸ is on target when he pens the following advice on how to interpret the text or the

¹⁷ The Second Missionary Journey took place around AD 50-53 (2,800 miles trip). This congregation was founded about twelve years after the Day of Pentecost. On the other hand, Paul sent this Philippian Epistle about twenty-nine years after the Day of Pentecost.

¹⁸ **Moisés Silva** (born September 4, 1945) is a Cuban-born American biblical scholar and translator.

entire book of Philippians more accurately, which is also applicable to any book of Holy Scripture:

The point is that we cannot properly evaluate a writer's position on some individual exegetical question if we are ignorant of that writer's own context. In other words, commentators have themselves become part of the exegetical tradition that needs to be interpreted. What follows is a very modest attempt to minimize our problem by giving a critical summary of selected commentators who have been particularly influential and who are referred to with some frequency in this commentary¹⁹

The Book of Philippians endorses the role of women along with the men sharing the Good News of God's way of salvation. Within the Christian community at Philippi, we need to reexamine the background of this unique body of believers, especially Lydia as the one who opened her home as a place of outreach for Jesus the Messiah. We need to remember that the "church" is not an institution, but a worshipping community. In our search for a greater understanding of the role of women in the assembly, we must become conscious that our traditions are NOT equal to Divine Revelation.

This history of the community of believers in Philippi is found in **Acts 16**, which is about seventeen years after the Day of Pentecost. Luke recorded this unique piece of history about twelve years following the establishment of this local body of believers who lived by faith. This information is essential toward understanding Paul's Epistle to the Philippians in which he specially mentions the names of two of the women teachers/ministers. In fact, the first converts were women who were engaged in devotion to God in a location called "a place of prayer" (**16:11-15**).

Apparently, Lydia's household became a residence from which to proclaim the Gospel. Paul did not set up a worship service with five prescribed rituals to be performed within a certain pattern. The Gospel, pure and simple, is Jesus. In other words, the **Gospel is not about a dogmatic system of a so-called worship service nor is it about an ethical code**, but rather, **it is about a person**, namely, Jesus. It is not uncommon for conservative scholars to fail in their observation that this book is about the ministry of both male and female. Yet, the **first verse of Chapter one** includes both male and female.

Paul penned the following words: "Paul and Timothy, servants [δοῦλοι, *douloi*] of Christ Jesus, To **all** God's holy people [ἁγίοις, *hagiois*, "saints"] in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons (**Philippians**

¹⁹ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 26.

1:1). Are women excluded in **1:1**? Are women who have responded to the Gospel like Lydia and her household not “servants” and “saints” of God? Are we saying that Lydia was not included in the word “servants” and “God’s holy people? What does the word “**all**” convey to your mind? Did the word “all” exclude women?

What about **1:2**: “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Did Paul exclude or reject the women from “grace and peace” who are now members of the Philippian congregation? About twelve-years later, following the conversion of Lydia, Paul wrote this Epistle? Are the women no longer classified as “servants” and “saints”? Did he discount the women as ministers when he wrote: “I thank my God every time I **remember you**” (**1:3**)? The women were not excluded from ministry. For instance, Paul continued to write:

And this is my prayer: that **your love [brothers and sisters]** may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,¹⁰ so that **you [brothers and sisters]** may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.¹² Now I want **you** to know, **brothers and sisters**, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.¹⁴ **And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all [brothers and sisters] the more to proclaim the gospel without fear. (1:9-14)**

Unfortunately, many translations interpret the Greek word *ἀδελφοί* (*adelphoi*) as brothers wherein the context should read “**brothers and sisters.**” The NIV (2011) corrected this error and properly translated the Greek word as “**brothers and sisters.**” The following comments by **George Guthrie** about the Greek word *adelphoi* should clear the cobwebs in our dealing with the text:

The term *ἀδελφοί* (*adelphoi*) **referred to both men and women** in religious contexts of the ancient world, so **the translation needs both genders to be accurate**. For example, Jesus refers to a disciple as “brother” (e.g. Matt 12:50; 28:10; Mark 3:35; John 20:17). That the women **Euodia** and **Syntyche**, leading women in the church at Philippi, are mentioned overly at 4:2 demonstrates that there were **men and women** addressed by Paul’s letter.²⁰(Emphasis mine--bold)

²⁰ George H. Guthrie, *Philippians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2023), 91 (see footnote # 5). **Dr. George H. Guthrie** serves as the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. A specialist in New Testament and Koine Greek, he’s authored numerous articles and has written 11 books, including the *NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*. **Dr. Guthrie** has

We should reread **1:14**. In this verse, Paul included the women as individuals who also proclaimed the word without fear. **As Paul concluded this Epistle, he mentions two women who were active in their ministry.** We should listen to Paul as he encouraged the two women to work together. They were included in **1:14**, which state that the women were also proclaiming the Gospel. We should pay attention to Paul as he describes these two women:

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! ²I plead with **Euodia** and I plead with **Syntyche** to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have **contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers** [συνεργῶν μου, *synergōn mou*], whose names are in the book of life. (**4:1-3**)

Why would God disenfranchise at least 50% of His work force? These **two women along with Clement were Paul's co-workers** (συνεργός, *synergos*) **in proclaiming the Gospel** (see **Philippians 1:14**, note above). In the Book of Romans, Paul calls attention to the names of twenty-nine **co-workers**. Out of this number ten were women. Paul began this Epistle with a reference to Phoebe (Φοίβην, *Phoibēn*) who is a minister (δίακονος, *diakonos*) in the congregation at Rome (**Romans 16:1**). Paul then follows this **statement** (minister) with Phoebe as a “leader or director” (προστάτις, *prostatis*) within this fellowship. In **16:3**, Paul called Priscilla (prī-sīl'ā) and Aquila (āk'wī-lā) his **co-workers** (συνεργῶν μου, “my co-workers”) in Christ. This same phraseology is employed with Phoebe (fē'bē) as well as with Clement (klēm'ēnt), Euodia, and Syntyche in **Philippians 4:1-3**. The following commentary on **1:14** by George H. Guthrie is extremely informative:

participated in translation projects, such as the revision of The New Living Translation, and has served as a consultant on the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New Century Version, and the English Standard Version. He also served for five years as a cochair of the “Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics” section of SBL, has served on the executive committee of the Institute for Biblical Research, and has served on the editorial board for Sheffield's JSNTS monograph series. At Union University, he has led in the establishment of, and serves as senior fellow in, the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, which is committed to promoting sound Bible reading, study, and interpretation at the grassroots level of the church. Dr. Guthrie holds both PhD and MDiv degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Specifically, they [men and women] dared “to speak the word”⁴¹ (τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν, *ton logon lalein*) of God “unflinchingly” (ἀφόβως *aphobōs*); that is, “fearlessly,” in a hostile environment. The exact expression “to speak the word” (τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν) occurs only here in the New Testament, though variations of the expression are frequent.⁴² Normally, the language is employed of the word of God, seen expressed as someone speaking “the word of God” (e.g., Acts 4:31; 13:46; 2 Cor 2:17; Heb 13:7) or “the word of the Lord” (e.g., Acts 8:25; 16:32; 1 Thess 1:8). Further, Paul elsewhere can refer to “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18) or “the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19). **From the references to “preaching” or “proclaiming Christ” in the immediate context (1:15, 17), it seems clear that speaking the word in 1:14 refers to some form of public utterance about the gospel.**²¹ (Emphasis mine—bold, underlining, and transliteration of the Greek)

The English word “*deacon*” is not, in my judgment, an accurate translation of the Greek word **διάκονος** (*diakonos*).²² The same is true with the translation of **Philippians 1:1** “Paul and Timothy, servants [**δοῦλοι**, *douloi*] of Christ Jesus, to all God’s holy people [**ἁγίοις**, *hagiois*, “saints”] in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers [**ἐπισκόποις**, *episkopois*] and deacons [**διακόνους**, *diakonois*, “ministers”]. The word *episkopois* (overseers) corresponds to the Greek

⁴¹ The text “to speak the word” (τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν) is reflected in NA²⁸ and UBS⁵, following Ɔ⁴⁶ D² K 630. 1505. 1739. 1881 Ɔ r vg^{ms} Mcion^T. The variant that adds “of God” (τοῦ θεοῦ) has strong and varied support (Ⲭ A B [D*] P Ψ 048^{vid}. 075. 0278. 33. 81. 104. 326. 365. 629. 1175. 1241. 2464 lat sy^{p,h**} co; CI), but it almost certainly presents a scribal addition, since the former, shorter reading almost certainly gave rise to the latter.

⁴² E.g., Mark 2:2; 4:33; 5:36; 8:32; Luke 24:44; John 12:48; 15:3; Acts 4:29, 31; 8:25; 11:19; 13:46; 14:25; 16:6, 32; Col 4:3; Heb 13:7.

²¹ George H. Guthrie, *Philippians*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 98–99. **Dr. George Guthrie** serves as the Benjamin W. Perry Professor of Bible at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. A specialist in New Testament and Koine Greek, he’s authored numerous articles and has written 11 books, including the *NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*. Dr. Guthrie has participated in translation projects, such as the revision of The New Living Translation, and has served as a consultant on the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New Century Version, and the English Standard Version. He also served for five years as a cochair of the “Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics” section of SBL, has served on the executive committee of the Institute for Biblical Research, and has served on the editorial board for Sheffield’s JSNTS monograph series. At Union University, he has led in the establishment of, and serves as senior fellow in, the Ryan Center for Biblical Studies, which is committed to promoting sound Bible reading, study, and interpretation at the grassroots level of the church. Dr. Guthrie holds both PhD and MDiv degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a ThM from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

²² See page 9, in this essay, for a more extensive analysis of the two words—Bishops and Deacons—by Earle Ellis.

word **πρεσβύτερος** (*presbyteros*, “older person”), which is similar or practically synonymous with the meaning of *episkopois*].

Today, within the Christian community, these two words (**overseers** and **deacons**) function as officers within an ecclesiastical or hierarchal structure within many denominations. These Greek words (overseers [**ἐπισκόποις**, *episkopois*] and deacons [**διακόνους**, *diakonois*, “ministers”]) carry a lot of cultural baggage in the twenty-first century body of Jesus. These terms are now considered titles, which conveys the idea of authority. In the first century, these two Greek words did **not** convey two distinct coordinated offices within the fellowship of God’s people. When Paul used these terms, he employed them as simply **functional words**, which words describe Christian activity within the body of believers rather than “authority.”

Conclusion

In the early church, we observe that both men and women often served as leaders and teachers within the Christian community. As stated above, the traditional view today limits the role of leadership to men since women cannot exercise authority over the male. Are male teachers allowed to exercise authority over both male and female saints? **Do we recall the words of Jesus concerning His disciples who sought to exercise authority over other saints**—both male and female (see **Matthew 20:20-28; 23:2**). It is not uncommon for male preachers, teachers, and elders to exercise authority over God’s saints. **As a result of this mind-set toward women, they are excluded from teaching in the assembly of the saints.** The biblical concept is that neither male nor female are to exercise authority over others within the congregation. Within many fellowships, Christians are not allowed to express their thoughts if the elders take another view point. The modern-day position of male leadership contradicts what Jesus related to His Twelve disciples who sought places of power or authority. He pens the following words of Jesus:

When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the **rulers [ἄρχοντες, *archontes*] of the Gentiles lord it over [κατακυριεύουσιν, *katakuriuousin*] them, and their **high officials exercise authority [κατεξουσιάζουσιν, *katexousiazousin*] over them.** ²⁶ **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (**Matthew 20:24-28**)**

From a biblical perspective, teachers and leaders do not exercise authority over anyone within the Christian community. The one-man pastor system often assumes authority over the other members of the local fellowship concerning teaching, praying, presiding at the communion table. In other words, within God's Jesus group, He has not ordained certain persons to exercise authority over other Christians. Within God's Jesus group (Christ believers), whether male or female, He has not set certain males to lord it over other Christians that are also a part of God's New Community (Jesus group). Biblical leaders should encourage ethical behavior that brings glory to God (**Hebrews 13**).

Within some Churches of Christ and other denominations, the so-called appointed elders, bishops, and deacons assume authority over the members. In other words, other believers must accept their orders or face expulsion from the congregation. Their words are "law," no deviation or nonconformity from their interpretation of the Scriptures. Also, it is not uncommon for some preachers within the Christian movement to exhibit this same dictatorial, tyrannical, and dogmatic mentality. Just a brief history of the Reformation Movement reveals that Christians were executed for revolt against the interpretation of the ones in authority. As Christians, we need to study the lives of John Wycliffe, John Hus, William Tyndale, Martin Luther, the Radicals, and the Scottish Covenanters. During the lives of these men, the church had become an "institution" with its bishops and so-called priest.

Appendix

Rules for Correct Interpretation

By Dallas Burdette

1. We should avoid reading the **Bible from within our inherited traditions.**
2. In our study of the Scriptures, we must first work to overcome our **theological illiteracy.**
3. In our investigation of the Scriptures, we must become conscious of **regulated reading (deep-seated teaching)**, which reading limits our interpretation of the text.

4. Unfortunately, the **guise of tradition or our practice shapes our reading** of the text.
5. Unconsciously, **we have been indoctrinated** to read the Scriptures without historical investigation.
6. It is not uncommon for Christians to read the Scriptures without consideration of the culture behind the text. In other words, we study God's word in a vacuum.
7. One of the problems that Christians encounter is the method of biblical interpretation. That is to say, the interpretation of the Scriptures is **determined by our predispositions or biases** of each distinctive body of believers.
8. If we **scale the wall of our traditions**, we will often suffer the wrath of the leaders when we question our chosen teachers.
9. We read the biblical text within line of our own inherited or inbred traditions, that is to say, our "ancestral" backgrounds.
10. As Christians, we need to reexamine our own world of biblical interpretation versus the biblical text itself.
11. It is not uncommon for Christians to avoid the context in order to uphold earlier engrained interpretations.
12. We must separate our twenty-first century reading of the text from the original text with its own cultural background.
13. **Simply citing a biblical text is not sufficient.** We need to inquire as to what God is doing in this unique text.²³

²³ For an excellent work on how to interpret the Scriptures, I suggest the following book: Joel B. Green and Max Turner, Editors, *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies & Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).