

# Paul's consistent teaching on sisters

## CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

**'We would suggest there are indicators in the text itself, contextual markers, that are not there by accident but to guide us toward an objective meaning. An objective meaning is thus mediated by the text itself. The text's indicators limit the possibilities so that the number of meanings available to the reader is not infinite.'**<sup>1</sup>

## CONSISTENT TEACHING

Using specific rules of interpretation,<sup>2</sup> seven passages have been identified as containing explicit teaching on the subject of the roles and relationship with men, of women in the ecclesia and the family. These passages are widely accepted among complementarians, egalitarians, and unaligned commentators as passages containing such explicit teaching, and all seven passages share a common theme.<sup>3 4</sup> Specific content is found repeated

consistently within these passages.<sup>5</sup> This is not a matter of one or two verses, nor an isolated text of Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

### Headship

- 1 Corinthians 11:3, 'the man is the head of a woman'
- Ephesians 5:23, 'the husband is the head of the wife'

### Submission

- 1 Corinthians 14:34: 'let them be in submission'
- Ephesians 5:22: '**Wives, submit** to your husbands as to the Lord'<sup>7</sup>

2:4–5; and 1 Pet 3:1–7.1.', *ibid.*, p.106; Walker claims Paul did not write any of these passages.

<sup>5</sup> 'Even more striking, however, is the complete command that wives be "submissive to their (own) husbands," which occurs with essentially the same wording in Col 3:18; Eph 5:21–22; Titus 2:5; and 1 Pet 3:1,5.9 Other parallels include references to "learning" (1 Cor 14:35; 1 Tim 2:11), "silence" or "silent" (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11,12; 1 Pet 3:4), "not permitting" (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12), "pure" or "holy" (Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:2), "adornment," "adorned," or "adorning" (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3,5), "clothing" (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3), "gold" (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3), "braided" or "braiding" (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3), "head" (1 Cor 11:3,4,5,7,10; Eph 5:23), and "disgrace" or "disgraceful" (1 Cor 11:4,5,6,14; 1 Cor 14:35).', *ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>6</sup> 'This brief survey of 1 Corinthians has shown that **there are not only two passages at issue when talking about the role and status of women in this letter** (11:2–16; 14:34–35) **but five** (5:1–5; 7:1–40; 16:19; see also 1:11) **or even six** (15:5–8), and some references to women in other Pauline letters **need to be included as well.**' Crocker (egalitarian), 'Reading 1 Corinthians in the twenty-first century', p. 156 (2004); see also chapter one, 'Identifying Key Texts'.

<sup>7</sup> The verb 'submit' is not in the Greek text in this verse, but is implied and therefore supplied in standard modern translations (it appears in the Greek text in verse 24); Bruce (egalitarian), writes 'No verb is expressed in v. 22, **the imperative "be subject"** (a participle in the Greek text) **being understood from v. 21.**', 'The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians', New International

- Colossians 3:18: '**Wives, submit** to your husbands'
- 1 Timothy 2:11: 'A woman must learn **quietly with all submissiveness**'
- Titus 2:5: 'being **subject to their own husbands**'
- 1 Peter 3:1, '**wives, be subject** to your own husbands.'

### Silence & quietness

- 1 Corinthians 14:3: 'women **should be silent** in the churches'
- Ephesians 5:24: '**wives should submit** to their husbands in everything'
- 1 Timothy 2:12: 'She must **remain quiet**'

### Not permitted

- 1 Corinthians 14:34: 'they are **not permitted to speak**'
- 1 Corinthians 14:35: 'it is disgraceful **for a woman to speak in church**'
- 1 Timothy 2:12: '**I do not allow** a woman **to teach or exercise authority over a man**'

<sup>1</sup> Dockery, 'Biblical interpretation then and now: Contemporary hermeneutics in the light of the early church', p. (1992)

<sup>2</sup> 'We consider the methods printed by Dr Thomas and from your own website (see below) to be sound, and we reckon we have followed them.', 'Reply 1', p. 64 (February 7, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Walker (egalitarian), 'The "Theology of Woman's Place" And the "Paulinist" Tradition', Semeia (28.101), (1983).

<sup>4</sup> '**It is well known that certain passages in the New Testament** deal with the status, role, attire, and/or general demeanor of women in such a manner as to support the principle of male dominance and female subordination, both in the home and in the church (and by implication in society as well). **These passages are seven in number: 1 Cor 11:3–16; 1 Cor 14:34–35; Col 3:18–19; Eph 5:22–33; 1 Tim 2:8–15; Titus**

Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 383-384 (1984), Kistemaker writes, '**The verb is undoubtedly to be supplied from the preceding verse**', 'Exposition of Ephesians', Baker New Testament Commentary, volume 7, p. 247 (1990), Bratcher & Nida write, 'In translation the verb **must be supplied from the participle of "to submit" in the preceding verse.**', 'A Handbook on Paul's letter to the Ephesians', UBS Handbook series, p. 139 (1993), Boles writes 'The word "submit" **is drawn from v. 21**', 'Galatians & Ephesians', College Press NIV commentary (1993).

## Teaching supported from other passages of Scripture<sup>8</sup>

- 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, 'For a man should not have his head covered, since **he is the image and glory of God. But the woman** is the glory of the man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, **but woman for man.**'
- 1 Corinthians 14:34, 'Rather, let them be in submission, **as in fact the law says.**'
- 1 Timothy 2:13-14, '**For Adam was formed first and then Eve.** And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, **because she was fully deceived, fell into transgression.**'
- 1 Peter 3:5-6, 'For in the same way **the holy women who hoped in God long ago adorned themselves by being subject to their husbands,** like Sarah who obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You become her children when you do what is good and have no fear in doing so.'

From the relevant socio-historical background, we know that private associations were free to decide on their own codes of conduct even if these breached social norms, and that 1st century Christian women (whether Jews or Gentiles), would have had reasonable

expectations of participating in the congregational worship as a result of their previous religious experiences. This being the case, Paul would have been aware of how his commandments concerning women sounded, and accordingly sought to soften the message.<sup>9</sup> Egalitarian scholars have noted this particular feature of Paul's commandments, in the seven passages in which he gives commandments concerning the relationship of men and women in the ecclesia and the family using a formulated style.

'In 11:11–12, however, **he backtracks lest the Corinthians become confused and think that he implies that women are inferior to men.** He is not attempting to establish a gender hierarchy that places women in a subordinate role. **Since he argues from hierarchy to make his case about head coverings, he needs to caution against any misapplication of what he says.** Women and men are interdependent in the Lord.'<sup>10</sup>

Walker provides a detailed analysis of these passages using the following formula.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 'a "mitigation," "softening of the blow," or "saving phrase" to make the statement, assertion, or command less offensive to women.', *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Garland (egalitarian), '1 Corinthians', Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 508-509 (2003)

<sup>11</sup> 'In some passages, the pattern becomes more complex, and, at times, it is not clear whether element "c" is present at all. Thus, the pattern of 1 Pet 3:1–6 is 'a' (v 1a), 'b' (vv 1b–2), 'a' (vv 3–4a), 'b' (vv 4b–6a), with v 6b either a continuation of 'b' or perhaps a very subtle form of 'c.' The pattern of 1 Cor 14:34–35 is 'a' (v 34a), 'b' (v 34b), 'a' (v 34c), 'b' (v 34d), 'a' or possibly a subtle form of 'c' (v 35a), 16 'b' (v 35b). In Titus 2:4–5, the pattern is a simple 'a' (vv 4–5a), 'b' (v 5b), with 'c' absent altogether. Three of the passages introduce a somewhat modified form of element 'c' with a command to husbands that they love their wives. Thus, Col 3:18–19 follows the simple

**'a. General Statement, Assertion, or Command** (vv 8–12) I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent.

**b. Reason or Justification** (vv 13–14) For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

**c. Mitigation, Softening of the Blow, or Saving Phrase** (v 15) Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."<sup>12</sup>

(Jonathan Burke, 2010)

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pattern, 'a' (v 18a), 'b' (v 18b), 'c' (v 19), while Eph 5:22–33 has the more complex pattern, 'a' (v 22), 'b' (v 23), 'a' (v 24), 'c' (vv 25–33a), 'a' (v 33b); and 1 Pet 3:1–7 has the pattern, 'a' (v 1a), 'b' (vv 1b–2), 'a' (vv 3–4a), 'b' (vv 4b–6 or perhaps 4b–6a with 6b a very very subtle form of 'c'), 'c' (v 7). The analysis of 1 Cor 11:3–16 is again complicated by the question of the unity of the passage.<sup>17</sup> If it is a single unit, then the pattern is apparently 'a' (vv 3–6), 'b' (vv 7–10), 'c' (vv 11–12), 'b' (vv 13–16), although the distinctions are not as clear here as they are elsewhere. If, however, the passage is divided into three pericopes, as has been suggested, then the following patterns emerge: "Pericope A" follows the pattern, 'a' (v 3), 'b' (vv 8–9), 'c' (vv 11–12); "Pericope B" the pattern, 'a' (vv 4–6), 'b' (vv 7, 10, 13, 16), with no 'c'; and "Pericope C" consists almost entirely of element 'b,' with 'a' only implied and 'c' absent altogether.<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Walker, (egalitarian) 'The "Theology of Woman's Place" And the "Paulinist" Tradition', *Semeia* (28.107), (1983).

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<sup>8</sup> 'The second point to be considered is that **at least four of the passages in question appeal to the OT, and particularly to the book of Genesis, to support their views regarding women.** 1 Cor 11:7–9 cites the creation of Adam and Eve, 1 Tim 2:13–14 the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, 1 Pet 3:6 the story of Sarah and Abraham, and 1 Cor 14:34 simply "the law."<sup>11</sup> This, too, suggests a common origin or source, or at least a common tradition, underlying the various passages in question.', *ibid.*, pp. 104-105.