

## Misinterpretive Teaching Reinforcing Sexism: A Christian Context

Dr. Benjamin Gangmei, Associate Professor, HOD of Department of Political Science,  
United College, Chandel, Manipur, India.  
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21025081

### Abstract

*Society largely patriarchal in structure and expression often remains intransigent even after change in belief, value system, etc. The patriarchal practices are sometime retained as mixed emerging as new form of socio-religious culture. This is true, in many cases, of Christian set-ups in society. While its mode of retention may be through cultural process, it is, in Christian context, through the religious teachings which are supposedly based on the scriptures. The teachings, when taught and practiced, reinforced the old sexism of a given society if the teachings are misinterpretive. Therefore, the outcome is continuation of sex discrimination often with benevolent sex discrimination. Therefore, there must be proper understanding of the actual imports of some problem scriptures of the Bible. In this regard the scriptures in question are 1Corinthians 14:34-35; Ephesians 5:21-25; and 1Timothy 2:11-14. The passages carry apparent teachings on sexism with regard to women speaking in church, submission to husband and authority over man. Yet, the first passage is about proper mode of learning spiritual things, and the second is about mutual respect between wife and husband and the last passage teaches on prohibition of false teachings by women. Understood properly the scriptures they negate sexism. Making them sexist is from patriarchal bias ingrained in belief and teachings. The article is a humble attempt in earnest.*

**Keywords:** Keep Silence, Submission to Husband, Authority over Man, Usurpation of Man's Authority, Misinterpretive Teachings.

Gender study on Christianity plane primarily needs on two counts: debate on men-women relationship set by the Bible and Christianity has been continuing in the churches, and the teachings of the Bible and of the Christianity on gender equality are said to have found compounded gender problems in Christian context. So, our attention is drawn for an incisive study of the relationship and the teachings. And correct understanding of the issues may certainly help the concerned groups to set the problem at rest in the interest of all concerned.

The crux of the debate about men-women relationship is whether the view of superiority of men held by menfolk is tenable or not. And the view is said to have been productive of sex discrimination and the assigning of low status to women. Such gender problems are characterised by the acceptance of subordinate position of women, belief in the inferiority of women, exclusive distribution of priestly offices among the male members, etc. So, what the Church follows and expresses are said to be patriarchal in practice. And Christian society is, in fact, branded as new patriarchal society built upon old patriarchal foundation. Christian women, therefore, are constrained to search for their identity and the endeavour for gender equality and empowerment became inevitable in society. The fire of gender equality is ignited internally but make it burn by the wind of change blown into the society.

The feminist thinking among Christians, as stated above, started as influenced by feminist ideology prevalent in the west and elsewhere. It is natural because Christian society

is no exception to gender problems. Feminism as such has different types. In the introduction to "A Reader in Feminist Theology" Prasana Kumari has pointed out three types of feminism such as liberal, socialist and cultural feminism. While the three are relevant to one context or other, cultural feminism which directs against "predominantly masculine culture and values" is more relevant to the present study. In other words, the gender problems confronting Christian society on religious plane are primarily over the issues relating to men-women inequitable relationship. The relationship is allegedly set by the Bible and upheld by Christian teachings. (Kumari, 1993 P.5)

In Christianity, feminist thinking is said to have started in the 19th century defending women's cause with scriptural support. In other words, the feminists tried to promote women's cause with scriptural proofs and thereby countered the passages which were used to "silence women". In the second place attempt was made to study the contributions of women of the Bible. And in the third place the feminists critically assessed biblical texts and branded as "sexist", (Kumari, 1993). These three types belonged to the first stage of feminist hermeneutics.

In the 20th century the feminists drew their attention to the question whether women characters of the Bible do serve as "role-models for women seeking empowerment and gender equality". Some feminists were not affirmative on the ground that women characters were "enmeshed in patriarchy". And others were affirmative of empowerment prospect. For both ancient and modern women living in patriarchal cultures does "intersect" showing the fact of empowerment of women. So, while positing the Bible is "androcentric" or man-centred and urging to leave or reject those "sexist texts as unauthoritative", the role played by women characters of the Bible should be accepted as fact of gender equality and women empowerment.

What is, for the object, important is to discover the principles which are permissive of the Bible for gender equality? For, a challenge to "androcentric system and structures which are deep rooted in our cultures" is prime concern of present feminist theology in seeking new identity of women and transforming one's community into "just and humane community." In other words, the main object of the feminist theology is to correct the sorry "patterns of patriarchal influence on Christian theology." (Kumari, 1993 P.6). But it must be kept in mind that women empowerment or gender equality issue dealt on religious (Christian) plane should be settled as far as possible, within the bound of the Holy Scriptures.

For the issues involved in the process of women religious empowerment is such as androcentric question, presence of alleged sexist biblical texts, the question of patriarchal influence on Christian theology, etc. indeed demand direct solution of Holy Scriptures. Either party seeking solution outside scriptures by deviating from or misconstruing scriptural stands on the issue may confuse and confound the concerned parties without solution.

The present study of gender equality is necessarily linked to Christian feminism. Christian feminism is liberation theology which aims at achieving identity for women. The identity is sought through the accomplishment of gender equality and practical empowerment of women. And the equality and empowerment are meant for building "abundant life" of all human beings. (Kumari, 1993 P.5)

Perceived exclusion of women in different roles, feminist theologians treat the exclusion as injustice and oppression to women from which they should be liberated. Therefore, feminist theology is, contextually and universally, a liberation theology as it deals with sexism which is common phenomenon in both contexts. Feminist theology revolutionizes traditional theology which is considered patriarchal or androcentric

theologisation. The theology is said to have downplayed women's experiences, history, roles and is treated as deleterious to those spheres of women. The reason is that the theology remains as main culture-shaping force and the perpetuation of men's exclusive attitude to women's roles in history and their experiences. Therefore, this state of affairs compelled women to start feminist friendly theology by questioning the patriarchal mindset used for traditional theology. (Hnuni, 2014, PP.16-18)

The philosophical root of Christian feminism lies in the rejection of dualism. It is rejected on the ground that dualism creates differences in cognition and application. For example, in gender dualism male and female is cognised as different gender individuals. And male is seen as "first member" and "active" and female seen as one who is short of man's position. So, Christian feminism which emphasises "the interdependence, connectedness, equal value and mutual need" rejects dualism. (Kumari, 1993 PP.6-7). What is important here is to examine whether there is scriptural imperative for such uninterchangeable order of importance for all thing particularly concerning man-women relationship.

While Christian feminism as such is a philosophical discourse held in quest of identity for women by discovering the full humanity of women, what is relevant to present study is the examination of select areas such as role, status, gender equality, etc. by paying our attention to biblical texts in question. For the groups in question are concerned with scriptural imports and interpretation of the scriptures when they come to the select areas. There are certain scriptural texts which give rise to controversy in the matter of gender equality. Unless the texts are correctly interpreted no one can put the controversy at rest.

1Co 14:34-35, "Let your women keep in silence in the Churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the Church." (Nave's Study Bible, 1978 P.1584). These verses have generated arguments and counter-arguments in the contention for gender equality. One of the main questions over which the arguments centering around is whether Paul's injunction bears contextual or universal nature. It is commonly accepted that the injunction was given for particular group of women for an orderly worship. But what is pertinent to ask is how about women who are in like-situation today? The injunction should go beyond the historical context and time meaning its validity exists for all like-situations of all ages. So, John Stott has rightly said that "even if this apostolic instruction can be proved to have been situational, it remains applicable to similar situation today. After all, every New Testament epistle is an occasional document, which addresses particular problems in particular Churches; the epistle nevertheless continues to speak to our condition today." (Stott, 2003, PP. 302-304). Moreover, the references (1Co 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:8-15) which give injunctions about "a woman" and "women" are "generic, not specific". (Stott, 2003).

Therefore, the interpretation that the injunction bears a temporary or contextual nature does not help to settle the problem of gender inequality. For the injunction does not affirm the inequality nor does negate the same. And the biblical texts are not sexist either because, contextually viewed the injunction, men, if they were also guilty of the similar questionable behaviour in the Corinthian Church, or could also necessarily be enjoined in similar way. In short, any discussion, basing on the text, has shown no conclusive point about gender problems, such as gender inequality, sexism, etc. Therefore, the matter discussed in Eph. 5:21-25 and I Co 11:3-16 is important to be dug into right imports of masculine leadership for proper understanding of gender issues of the Bible.

Eph. 5:21-25, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. How as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (New International Version, 1983). The scripture is to read with these scriptures: 1Co. 11:3-12, "Now I want you to realize that the head of everyman is Christ and the head of the woman is man, And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head... A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man, neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God."(New International Version, 1983)

While the above quoted scriptures do give injunctions to woman to "submit" to her husband and honour her "head", man, both the Biblical texts also do use something inclusive and make interdependent between two sexes. For Eph. 5:21 is explicit of inclusiveness of two sexes while exercising their submission. In other words, the submission is to be rendered mutually by the respective sexes. And 1Co 11:11-12 makes interdependence between the two sexes obligatory. Then, if submission enjoined is inclusive of both sexes and interdependence is to be exercised by respective sexes, it is implicit that the terms "submit" and "head" become important for understanding gender equality of the Bible. As to the term "submit" the Greek word "hupotasso" implies "a sense of voluntary submission to the will of another with no thought of the importance of the other person. Here again there is no implication of cultural reinforcement of stereotypes. Rather the fear or respect of the wife to the husband is to be deemed as reverential respect which describes a woman's love for her husband, and not that of a slave to the master" (Kumari, 1993, P.39). Here one must read Eph. 5:21, where the verse speaks of mutual submission between sexes, with Eph. 5:22, 24 which speak of wife's submission to husband. The latter does not contradict the former and vice versa. Then "hupotasso" is equally applicable to both sexes. So, there is no question of sexism nor is inferiority hinted by the biblical text (Eph. 5:21-24). In short, it is mutual submission to be maintained by the respective sexes out of their mutual respect. And the submission which is to be mutually maintained is compatible with equality – gender equality.

Then, what is important in the study of gender equality from biblical perspective is the question of masculine headship. Of course, the question of masculine headship must be, for every logical reason drawn from the discussion made on wife's submission to husband, consistent with the notion of wife's submission to husband or head. For headship and submission are alluded in the same injunction and for same reason. Then, the pertinent questions are: Does the masculine leadership speak of authority? If so, it is compatible with the principle of mutual submission between sexes out of their mutual respect. If no, how do we understand the masculine headship? We all must agree that headship implies "some degree of leadership, which, however, is best expressed not in terms of "authority" but of "responsibility" on the following logical reasons.

Firstly, Christ's relationship with the Church or husband's relationship with wife is made through love. Secondly, practically speaking love and authority are incompatible with one another. Therefore, biblical masculine headship, while implies some degree of leadership, is not authority but of masculine responsibility. For love and responsibility are

functionally compatible and the latter (responsibility) is not incompatible with equality. In fact, responsibility can be maintained horizontally and authority, by nature, functions vertically or exclusively (Stott, 2003, P. 306). It is illogical that no person exercises literal authority over someone to whom he simultaneously loves. But it is possible with responsibility meaning one can exercise both responsibility and simultaneously love for someone. Therefore, biblical masculine headship is hermeneutically best understood in term of "responsibility". And headship is one which is "more of care than of control, more of responsibility than of authority." (Stott, 2003, P.307). Such nature of headship is what Paul envisaged and that is something logically conclusive.

We have seen so far the gender equality is envisaged in the Bible. But Peter apparently speaks of the opposite. Seemingly he creates discrepancy over the issue: gender equality. 1Pe 3:7 reads: Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the precious gift of life; so that nothing will hinder your prayers." (New International Version, 1983). This biblical text is neither sexist nor does negate gender equality for it talks about usual difference on physical plane. The reasons which do support the idea are: (1) The Greek word for "weaker" is "asthenesteros" which means "with less strength." On physical plane "men are by and large bigger than women, and by and large stronger than women (Stott, 2003, P. 308). So, while Peter speaks of such usual fact of less physical strength of women, he does not demean women or wives. Secondly, the treatment (treating wives/women) is to be accompanied with respect implying absence of demeaning to women or sexism in it. So, even if wives or women are accepted as weaker partners, they are not demeaned there. For they are treated equal with men as being co-heirs with men of new life. So, biblical headship is to "describe a major way in which women need men and men may serve women. It is not intended to suppress but to support them, and to ensure that they are, and may more fully become-their true selves." In fact, biblical masculine headship is "headship of protective care" (Stott, 2003) which makes no subordination of women to men. And it does not imply their "inferiority to men..." nor does engender "low self-esteem." (Stott, 2003)

Our discussion so far made, basing on the principle of mutuality, on controversial biblical texts, has shown that Bible does not teach gender inequality or sexism. If anything is apparent to be so, it was mostly injuncted women under contextual constraints and the injunction(s), while its principle may be applied in any like-situations today, are limited to those groups of women in question and confined to that context. Genesis 1:27 affirms gender equality which reads "So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This verse testifies to equal worth of men and women for being equally borne the image of God by them. Of course, according to Genesis 3:16 which were pronounced by God after the Fall, reading "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" is a truism of the distortion of the primeval sexual equality. So, "the domination of woman by man is due to the Fall, not the creation." (Stott, 2003, P.291)

Now what is pertinent to ask is: Whether women lost position of gender equality? It is usually viewed that "original equality" has been re-affirmed through the redemptive work of Christ. His work has accomplished two major things in restoring back the original equality. First, God calls men and women for service by imparting gifts of the Spirit to them. Secondly, irrespective of sexes, all repenting men and women are regenerated on same basis – saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-10) and made women coheirs with men of eternal life. So the Bible loudly claims the equality in Gal. 3:26- 29, which reads: "You are

all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (New International Version, 1983)

Now, the impartation of the gifts of the Spirit has to do with service and the service with the roles of Christians in the Churches. And if different gifts are equally imparted to both sexes, roles, if sex-based, are unscriptural. In other words, particular roles exclusively owned by men, in view of gifts imparted to both sexes, are institutional rather than charismatic. And the roles of men and women, if charismatically viewed, are derived from diverse gifts which are imparted to them which include leadership, preaching, etc. Concerning this matter Rom 12:4-8 state clearly: Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (New International Version, 1983) Every woman who is a child of God belongs to the body and has privilege as man has.

Of course, in gender issue, gifts like teaching, leadership, etc. draw more our attention. In other words, roles of women which they are supposed to play as teachers or leaders in spiritual context deserve critical focus on two counts: (i) Biblical prohibition on teaching by women, and (ii) the issue of women in Ministry, is crucial issues in gender matter. On the prohibition of teaching by women is stated in 1Tim 2:11-14 which reads: "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 (New International Version, 1983). Is there inconsistency in Paul's teachings particularly on women issue? If not, why did he give this injunction? Paul was consistent with his teachings on women particularly concerning teaching by women, masculine headship and submission of women. Remember the terms "head" and "submit" Paul employed were never used to debase or demean women. And the present prohibition of teaching by women is similar with the one he made for Corinthian women. In other words, the injunction in question was primarily meant for Ephesian Church women. For Paul nowhere passed the like-injunction except in 1Corinthians and 1Timothy. In point of fact, Paul encourages women to teach or prophesy (see Titus 2:3-4; 2Tim 1:5; 3:14). In 2Tim. 2:2 Paul encourages men and women to teach others. Here the term "men" in Greek is "anthropos" which means "mankind" or human beings and it is inclusive of women.

Then 1Tim 2:11-14 is an injunction or prohibition meant for the women (wives) in question. For the injunction "does not appear to be anything inherent in our distinctive sexualities which makes it universally inappropriate for women to teach men." (Stott, 2003, P.314) Then what had prompted Paul to make the prohibition? The prevailing atmosphere that prompted Paul for the prohibition was produced by heretical teachings (heresies) (1Tim. 1:3, 4; 6:20, 21; Rev. 2:6). The heresies, to which Ephesian Christian men and women exposed, generated or promoted "controversies" and "godless chatter" in the Ephesian Church. And how the women were guilty of the godless liquacy is revealed by the nature of restriction made on godless chatter and the implications of terms used in the instruction. The implications are explicit of the restriction on liquacious practices.

As to the nature of the injunction, it has two aspects - instruction and restriction. The former is about how to learn and the restriction is on non-apostolic teachings (doctrines). Concerning restriction, it is conclusive that some women did teach men in Ephesian Church. Had not they taught men Paul would not have been particular about it. What did they teach? Contextually viewed it is most likely that they taught something spiritually untrue as influenced by the prevailing heresies which are essentially deceptive. Therefore, the instance of how Eve was deceived was alluded. In other words, Paul took the deception of Eve which led to the fall of man as object-lesson while cautioning Christians, contextually women/wives, that deception in spiritual matter turned out to be disastrous. It was true of heresy-infested Ephesian Church. Its spiritual state and fate is revealed and predicted in Rev. 2:4-5.

The second aspect of the injunction is instruction on learning. Evidently some Ephesian Christian women failed to follow the right way in learning. Had they not been so, Paul would not have laid emphasis on "quietness", "submission" and "silence" while instructing women on learning. So, basing on the report about women's attitude to learning and teaching in Christian gatherings, Paul was prompted to make the prohibition on teaching by women by restricting them to teach heresies.

As to implications of certain terms "woman" and "teach" which are supportive to the interpretation that the injunction was for wife or wives against her/their teaching of non-apostolic doctrine? The Greek word "Gune" means wife. Of course, "a woman" is referred to any wife of the Ephesian Church. There are two things which are clear from the prohibition of women to teach. First, the prohibition of teaching is for wife or wives and is exclusive of unmarried females. Secondly, it was women (wives) who taught non-apostolic teachings or doctrines. This is supported by the interpretation of the term "didaskaleo" which means "to instruct or teach doctrine (Parrish and Parrish, 1999, P. 20). Most unmistakably some women (wives) taught something spiritually untrue in the Church. To be precise, they taught men non-apostolic doctrines. Were they competent to teach apostolic doctrines in those days? Were they more informed than men like Timothy though he might be younger than them? Not so, now if they did teach men with something unauthorised things they deserved restriction.

And the term "silence" in Greek is "hesuchia" which is in the meaning of "quietness" or "stillness". This meaning has to do with something physical implying that the Ephesian Christian women behaved contrarily not being quiet or still in the church. They stepped out of propriety of spiritual gatherings. Finally, the Greek word for the term "subjection" which must also be maintained by women in learning is "hupotage" which meant "subjection" or "submission". So, it is conclusive from this discussion that the injunction is for wife/wives in the event of their teachings of spiritually untrue things; that they maintained questionable style in their expression/speech in spiritual gatherings. Not only their teachings and style were wrong, no women including men were authorised to teach non-apostolic teaching in the church.

In this way the problem passage (1Tim 2:11-14) is discussed which deals with the problems of teaching by women. And before we take up another aspect - "authority over men", we can posit three things; (i) The letter (1Timothy), like all other letters was primarily meant for the particular local church; (ii) and like other letters, it was written to address certain specific problems which confronted the local church; (iii) yet each injunctive or prohibitory principle contained in the letters remains valid for or applicable to any like-situations in all ages. Imagine, new conversion situation when new converts, men and

women, who may be of different religious and cultural backgrounds, may tend to create the like- situation in any part of the world. Even in the church either party may create like-situations of Corinthian and Ephesian churches on certain issues. And it is scripturally unadvisable for either party (men and women or pro and against) to create rowdy scene over gender issues in the churches without actual respect and submission. Therefore, contextually viewed the injunction was meant for the local church in question. But its principle remains applicably valid if similar problems crop up in any spiritual situations. The injunction on teaching is therefore, meant for particular group of women of a local church and is without being sexist in it. In other words, 1Tim. 2:12 does not prohibit all females to teach theological education.

Prohibition on the usurpation of authority (1Tim. 2:12), was given by referring to the order of creation and deception meaning Adam was first created and then Eve, and sin came through the deception of Eve. Why does Paul put together these things? Is this injunction based on inherent distinctive sexuality? From all accounts it does not. If we critically read between the lines, the issue of usurpation of authority over a man by woman is come up in connection with the prohibition on teaching by woman. Observe the logical sequence of Paul's prohibition on teaching and usurpation of authority, and instruction on behaviour of women. To be precise, Paul instructed a woman (wife) to be "silent" in the matter of teaching and their authority (see the text: But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence). Why? In view of heresies in Ephesian church, women would teach, if they were permitted to do so, non-apostolic doctrines which evidently some of them did. And if women taught something heretical with questionable behaviour they would create problem of indiscipline and undermine the authority of the authorised men like Timothy. How would this likely? The women/wives would undermine the authority of apostolic doctrines which, directly or indirectly help them to gain upon the authority of men which they had for teaching apostolic doctrines over local church, etc. in those days. So, women were instructed to be "silent" in the matter of teaching and authority. And, what is core, in this regard, is the prohibition of teachings by non-delegates of divine truth for which any man including woman is equally prohibited. The authority the Bible speaks is truth-derived authority. In this way, the prohibition is not gender-specific. Any genders are prohibited on the ground of non-delegation of primary divine truth. So the prohibition is not sexist.

And it was against this women's tendency that Paul reminded women of masculine headship (Adam was created first). As to the idea of headship we will not repeat here. It is neither authority nor domination over a wife but a responsible headship with love, and mutual respect and submission between husband and wife. But Paul put together the issue of masculine headship and the deception of Eve. Why? What Paul actually wants to say is that husband is the head of wife, and she should do nothing to ignore his headship. If a wife challenges the headship or the order (husband is the head of wife) for her own exaltation she will be open to spiritual deception. Why we say this is of Paul's intention? Firstly, the issue of authority is restricted to husband-wife relationship. The term "Gune" used in the passage means "wife" and the positional relationship between husband and wife is illustriously referred to that of Adam and Eve - a couple. That is, Paul says that God created "Adam first, then Eve" and thereby he introduces the headship of husband. In Gen. 3:16 it says "he (Adam) will rule over you (Eve). Of course, rule does not imply authority or domination but headship which is vested with husband. And headship is not domination either. It is responsibility assigned to husband.

Secondly, Paul prohibits wife not to have authority over husband. Why? (a) wife's tendency for usurping authority or headship over man is scripturally predicted (see the text: "... Your desire will be for your husband") Gen. 3:16: Is this desire something positional or biological? According to scripture rulership was passed to Adam alone after the Fall - "he (Adam) will rule over you" (Eve), Gen. 3:16: Now the Hebrew word of "rule" is "mashal" which carries similar implication with that of Greek "kephale" which means head. For "mashal" does not imply authority but functional care or responsibility for something or someone. Therefore, it carries similar connotation with that of "kephale" and thus "mashal" also stands for the headship of husband. So, evidently Eve's desire is something positional. This line of interpretation is supported by another Greek word "authenteo" used in 1Tim. 2:12 for "authority" which means "to use one's own armour". The authority is not an institutional authority of women but one which has to do with one's resource or means for achieving something against someone.

The manner of the use is something illegitimate or unjustified. That is something wife should not do. Therefore, Paul prohibits wife or wives to do it. In other words, he cautions them that they may not be tempted to step out of their place in God's order. And wives may even desire to take over the men's place of God ordained rulership" or headship, (Parrish and Parish, 1999, P.20). In other words, if a wife challenges the headship of husband for her own exaltation she will be open to deception in divine matter.

Finally, therefore, the significance of Paul's reference to the deception of the Eve is linked to the issue of authority over a man. As we have seen that Eve had desire for a position with or over Adam saying "Your desire will be for your husband". Eve's desire for emulation was the root of her temptation (Jas. 1:14-15). Therefore, the tempter came to her.

Evidently, she acted independently in the event of her temptation. For she did not take Adam into confidence. She was naturally bound to be in that manner. Independence rather than submission was what she wanted for pushing herself forward. So, the Bible cautions husband and wife against such fundamental mistake and commands them to submit to one another. So, Paul taking Eve's deception as object-lesson cautions wife against her desire for having authority over husband and spiritual deception through her emulative tendency. In Ephesian church some wives who did attempt to push themselves forward were under influence of such tendency.

To sum up the discussion on the wife's desire/tendency for usurping authority over a man/husband and the significance of Paul's reference to the instance of the deception of Eve, it may be stated that if a wife ignores the headship of husband to push herself forward she is open to deception in divine matter. What is pertinent to add here is that everything related to gender concerns which seem good and reasonable is not spiritually expedient? For instance, western feminism which primely advocates for the independence of women from men is contradictory to biblical teachings on man-woman relationship and is thus perverse. Moreover, it is a flat refusal of the headship of man. Again, the feminists' endeavour for "inclusive language for God" (replacement of every male language for God in the Bible) is spiritually a degenerative initiative arising out of the quest for gender equality. It is distortive and perverse as well. The initiative is heretical in import and is thus deceptive. Such intellectual heresies are not dearth anywhere in modern Christian society.

Our discussion on the prohibition on teaching by women (wife) and her authority over a man shows that neither prohibition on teaching nor one that on authority is sexual discrimination in true imports. As to the prohibition on having authority over a man what actually Paul wanted was the reiteration on the headship of husband. And since the headship

is not authority or domination of husband over his wife, it is not sexual discrimination. For it is a responsible headship of husband or wife with love, respect and submission. So, the prohibition on having authority over a man is an injunction to wife so that she may not ever ignore the headship to take over his place. The Bible always prohibits such struggle of wife for her own exaltation. And the prohibition on such nature of struggle of wife has universal validity on the following grounds: (i) Husband-wife relationship set by the Bible is unalterable. In other words, headship of husband to which a wife should submit is unchangeably set. And her submission is not one done between superior-subordinate people but one out of voluntary act. (ii) A wife who ignores the headship of her husband to step positionally ahead of him is prohibited for being her action open to deception in divine matter. So, the prohibition, while it was meant for local problem, has universal validity as well for like-situation.

As to the prohibition on teaching, it is restricted to the teachings of non-doctrinal things by some wives in Ephesian church. As far as its primary purpose is concerned it has no universal validity. Even if the prohibition is made in connection with the prohibition on having authority, the question whether to teach or not to teach may also be decided by the motive of the wife. That, if her teaching is an attempt to reverse scriptural husband-wife relationship and even domineer men by ignoring his headship she is prohibited to teach man. And for the obverse on her part she is permitted to teach theological education.

Since the study about the prohibition on teaching by women (wives) has shown that the prohibition was not gender-specific: it was primarily given for local church and the wives with questionable behaviour, and God used of women in ministry in the Old Testament times and the impartation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to both sexes. Of them, perhaps the most relevant and convincing one is the impartation of gifts of the Spirit to both sexes which include theological teaching ministry. In fact, the prohibition on teaching seems not to have based on “anything inherent in our distinctive sexualities which make it universally inappropriate for women to teach men” “There is no evidence, or even hint, that the charismata in general were restricted to men, although apostleship does seem to have been. (Stott, 2003, P.314)

Moreover, the nature of the prohibition is permissible for teaching of theological education after the apostolic era. That the requirement of “high degree of authority” of the apostles for “their foundational teaching” is no longer needed. And no revelation can be expected today. So, both sexes if their teachings are solidly derived from the written scriptures validity of the prohibition do not arise except teachings done in non-delegatable nature or character by any genders (Stott, 2003). And Paul who prohibits wife (woman) not to teach on the charge of heresies also encourages both men and women to teach others (2Tim. 2:2). As stated earlier the term “men” in the passage is “anthropos” which means “a human being” or “mankind” - both men and women (Young, 1970, P.642). So, it is clear that women can teach theological education and the prohibition was meant and applicable in those days and to those wives in question in local Ephesian church.

We have paid due attention to the Bible teachings on gender equality. For the Bible is allegedly teaching gender inequality and is said to be a responsible factor for gender problem in Christian society. But it is clear that the Bible does not teach the way Christians thought. Then the church or Christian denominations are responsible for sexist teachings in the society. Some common gender concerns among Christians today are inferiority of women, authoritative headship of man over women (misinterpreted by menfolk), denial of equal status to women, etc. (Jonathan, personal communication, 2020)

The root of gender problems in Christian society can be traced back to two sources: (i) Hermeneutical misinterpretation of certain biblical texts and (ii) institutional bias. This is also basically located to the first source. Any endeavour for either equality or inequality the concerned enthusiasts have to be guided by the scriptures. In other words, every gender issue related to Christianity has to be, as far as possible, settled by the Bible for which correct hermeneutical position is a must for all concerned. As to one which is of institutional is more difficult in the sense that change is possible through consensus or has to come from higher authority. For example, denominations like Catholic or Presbyterian, etc. have centralised authority and no change can be effected by lower (local church) authority for gender issues like women priesthood or ordination of women, and the likes. Yet it is true that the real authority for any Christian denominational groups is the Bible from which they rise and exist.

As to the efforts Christian women made for gender justice in religious life, major measures are of educative. As they do for gender justice in the society, they often advocate formal measures such as the conduct of seminars, women conferences, sharing church pulpits, etc., in which they discuss gender equality, (Phaomei, personal communication, 2020). These measures are relevant to their efforts for bringing about change in man-woman relationship in several ways. First, the activists can make personal contact with the concerned people in suitable contexts such as church, mass gatherings, etc. Secondly, the idea of gender equality is spread in the form of message which even mass illiterate Christian men and women can personally hear and digest it. It is a medium of communication to which Christians are accustomed. Thirdly, the measures have actually demoted much energy needed for organised struggle for gender equality or justice. So, while there are things left unfulfilled, the society is moving forward creating atmosphere for gender equality and empowerment process.

Apart from this mode of efforts for the concerns, theologically trained Christian women along with like-minded educated men and women have devoted for the popularisation of women theology. Their efforts for the concern are sought mainly through two channels: (i) One channel is formulation of course content for women theological study and inclusion in Bible College/Seminary syllabus. So, it gives necessary scope focusing on Bible teachings and cultural influences which generate gender problems in the society. The second channel is the conduct of researches (both for degree accreditation and solution finding study) on women issues. The researchers are majorly manned by female candidates. This endeavour has facilitated the understanding and popularisation of gender problems particularly in intellectual circle of the society. Moreover, the female researchers are comparatively more informed than others and they lend strong support to women empowerment activities or they themselves become activists of gender equality and women empowerment. (Gangmei, personal communication, 2020)

Unlike churches in the past decades, the churches have increasingly produce Bible graduates and a number of Bible scholars today. While all of them are not extending their support to empowerment and gender equality efforts, many of them (both men and women) do work for the same. The later are the sustaining resource and reinforcing force for empowerment and equality in Christian society. The effective way they afforded is that their efforts are not confined to religious dimension but they also equally work for empowerment in socio economic and political matters. (Gangmei, personal communication, 2020) This is right because religious empowerment without empowerment in other dimensions is incomplete.

It is found that comparatively more attention is, as of now, drawn to the need of religious empowerment of women in Christian society. The reason is that the awareness of women religious empowerment in other Christian societies has motivated the concerned people to work for the same in the matter. Deprivation of any opportunities such as women priesthood, institutional or organizational headship of women, etc. is treated as sexual discrimination in male-dominated Christian society. In other words it is treated as denial of opportunities in religious life. In fact, debate over the like-gender issues has been continuing in Christian society. An ultimate solution to these issues lies in the correct understanding or interpretation of Bible teachings on women. Struggle for greater result may be through the leveraging of activism.

### References

- [1] Hnuni R.L. "Vision for Women in India: Perspective from the Bible." Church and Society, Lakshi Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2014.
- [2] Kumari, Prasana. *Reader in Feminist Theology*. Gurukul Lutheran Theological & Research Institute, Madras, 1993.
- [3] Parrish, Frank and Parrish, Wendy. *Women as Ministers and Leaders* (Indian Edn.), 1970.
- [4] Stott, John. *New Issues Facing Christian Today* (Indian edn.), GLS Publishing, Mumbai, 2003.
- [5] Young, Robert. *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*. WMB, Errmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 1970.
- [6] *Nave's Study Bible*. The Southern Western Company, USA, 1978.
- [7] *New International Version*. International Bible Society, New Jersey, 1983.

**Author Contribution Statement:** NIL.

**Author Acknowledgement:** NIL.

**Author Declaration:** I declare that there is no competing interest in the content and authorship of this scholarly work.



The content of the article is licensed under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> International License.