

“All One in Christ Jesus” - Chapters 1-16 by Averil and Ian McHaffie

Summarised by Lucy Dangerfield

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“YOU are the devil’s gateway; YOU are the unsealer of that tree; YOU are the first deserter of the divine law; YOU are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. YOU destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of YOUR desert - that is, death - even the Son of God had to die.” ~ Tertullian to women, 200AD. What a guy. (pg 24)

This booklet looks at the role of women in the ecclesia, in life, in everything. What I’ve done here is try to summarise each chapter with a set of concise bullet points.

I originally wrote these as I was reading the book, so I could quickly look back and refresh my memory in future. For this reason, a few of my own thoughts – not taken directly from the book – are included here. However, so they can be identified, *they’re italicised and underlined*.

1) IS THERE A PROBLEM?

- The ‘problem verses’ that people keep coming back to are 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12.
- On a surface reading, they seem clear: women should be silent in the church.
- But this is problematic for 2 reasons: firstly, it contradicts other Bible passages, such as in 1 Cor 11 where women clearly pray and prophesy in public; and secondly, it doesn’t fit that God would want women to suppress talents that God gave them in the first place. *It’s just a bizarre idea.*
- Obviously, the passages can be – and have been – interpreted in many different ways over time.

2) JESUS AND JUDAISM

- Jesus was a Jew, who taught the spirit of the law and prophets, not the letter. As God’s son, he spoke and acted with God-given authority, demonstrating life as God intended it to be.
- Therefore, as Jesus shows us the true meaning of God’s laws and is our ultimate example, it only makes sense that we should look to his attitude towards women for guidance.

3) WOMEN AT THE TIME OF JESUS

- What was Jewish society’s attitude toward women when Jesus was around? Various ancient Jewish writings have been consulted to build the picture.
- **Legally** – women were the property of their fathers or, after marriage, their husbands. The only way for a woman to not be ‘owned’ by a man was if she was widowed or divorced. She was ‘inferior to her husband in all things’ and was expected to do the cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. The husband had to treat her kindly; still, if the house was burning down, the fire brigade was required to save *him* first.

- **Religiously** – the temple had a separate court for women. In synagogues, though women were considered qualified to read, it came to be thought inappropriate for a woman to read from the scriptures publicly, just as it was for a man in rags.
- **Education** – women were educated from childhood so that they would know the law. For example, Timothy must have been taught the law from his mother, a Jew, as his father was a Greek unbeliever. But women were discouraged from studying the Law like the men could do. Women were thought to be naturally lustful and immoral, so they were barred from teaching school children (as also were unmarried men). Women were excused from many religious rituals, so that they could attend to household duties and also while they were ceremonially unclean during menstruation; so they had less exposure to religion in that way too.
- **Derogatory views** – it becomes evident from quotes and practices that women were considered inferior, natural liars. The ‘benediction’ – ‘Blessed be He who did not make me a woman’ – says it all. *(Incidentally, this reminds me of Buddhism, where a woman can’t reach enlightenment, but must first be reincarnated as a man.)*
- **Domestic** – women were responsible for food, clothes, looking after the children, and ensuring that her husband and sons were educated in the Law. This is a very important role.
- So, while women had influence over their homes, in other areas of life they were inferior to men, and were restricted by the Law. They were often ‘things’ rather than people.
- Jesus exploded this by liberating all kinds of ostracised people, allowing them unprecedented access to God. His attitude to women was very positive.

4) HOW JESUS TREATED WOMEN

- The crowds who listened to Jesus contained men, women and children alike. Jesus’ message was for all. He considered women just as worthy of hearing the gospel as men.
- Jesus with Mary and Martha, Luke 10: Jesus taught and they listened. When Martha got grumpy with Mary for choosing to listen to Jesus rather than do her household duties, Jesus said that Mary had made the right choice – to **learn**. This is in stark contrast to the Jewish views of the day that it was a waste of time to teach a woman.
- The Samaritan woman at the well, John 4: Jesus said some profound things to this woman, who was female **and** a Samaritan **and** they were alone **and** they were outside a town! Because of her testimony, many others also came to believe.
- Female followers. Although they could not preach like the male disciples (because nobody would have listened, not because Jesus forbade it), a large group of women travelled with Jesus, supporting him financially and practically. No other rabbi is known to have done this.
- Jesus allowed women to touch him, such as the one who anointed his feet, and the one with the haemorrhage. This was shocking to orthodox Jews. Jesus called them ‘daughters of Abraham’, just as he called male believers ‘sons of Abraham’ – all one in the family of God.
- Jesus treated the adulteress in John 8 with concern and morality. ‘Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.’
- Jesus sided with neither camp in the matter of divorce (easy or restricted). Instead, he taught that divorce was never God’s intention, thus protecting women from arbitrary divorce.

- Jesus taught that men and women could mingle; Jewish practice kept them separate because of ‘lustful thoughts’. Jesus taught that the men should control their own thoughts.
- Jesus’ attitude towards women was one of inclusion, free of barriers. Men and women alike needed baptising, and transformation. Jesus spoke of women in his parables too, not just men. As for his 12 disciples, no, none of them were women; but none of them were Gentiles or slaves, either. To spread the message to the Jews (to whom it was first brought), the disciples (and Jesus, too) had to have a status of influence – as free, Jewish men. This later changed when the gospel went to the Gentiles, as the next chapter explores.
- The first witnesses to the resurrection were women. If women are by nature liars and untrustworthy, why were they divinely trusted with reporting this massive event?
- So clearly, Jesus’ attitude to women was positive and revolutionary.

5) WHAT HAPPENED IN THE EARLY ECCLESIAS?

- Jesus’ example of valuing men and women alike was continued in the first Christian churches. In Acts, the phrase ‘both men and women’ recurs often to emphasise this. On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured on everyone – the men, and the women.
- Women of influence (like Lydia, an international businesswoman) became believers and spread the gospel, even centring ecclesias in their own homes.
- Throughout Acts and Paul’s writings, the terms ‘fellow workers’ and ‘those who labour in the Lord’ are applied to both male and female believers, with no distinction as to what work they can do.
- Priscilla and Aquila, the husband and wife superduo who travelled the world promoting the gospel, have no distinction ever drawn between them. As far as teaching is concerned, they both taught Apollos.
- Phoebe is described in Romans 16:1-2 as being a deacon and a church member of great influence. The Greek words used in this description are debatable, but have been skewed unfairly in the past – eg, the KJV really plays it down. *I guess we’ll have to ask her about it in the Kingdom.*
- Romans 16:7 mentions someone called Junia or Junias, who was ‘of note among the apostles’. Depending on how this is read, it could be a man (Junias) or a woman (Junia), who either **was** an apostle, or was **famed** in the view of the apostles but wasn’t one him/herself. Very ambiguous, but interesting.
- It can be concluded that women were similarly involved as men in the first ecclesias. Next question: were any distinctions in the work ever drawn?

6) ‘BROTHERS AND SISTERS’ IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- In the NT, believers are referred to as ‘brethren’. This can be shown to clearly encompass both men and women, by looking at the context. *(It’s like the French ‘ils’, when the context reveals that both men and women are included.)*
- In his writings, Paul uses inclusive Greek. He uses terms like ‘all’ and ‘each one of you’. His singular verbs are in the masculine form, but – *just like in English and French* – this is understood to include females.

- If Paul was addressing only males, he could have said so. He didn't. His language was inclusive.
- Roles within the ecclesia are listed with no further distinction. The only qualification needed to fulfil *any* role in the ecclesia – prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting etc – was that God had given you the ability.
- It's 'having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them' (Romans 12:6), *not* 'having gifts that differ according to our gender'!

7) PAUL'S GENERAL TEACHING

- Going chronologically through Paul's letters, his stance that men and women are one in Christ is clear.
- **Galatians** – Paul rebuffs certain believers who were trying to impose Jewish customs on Christian life. But Christ brought freedom from that: 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither *male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). *What a verse!*
- **Thessalonians** – the only distinction Paul makes among believers is that of leaders and those who need leading. Male/female doesn't come into it. The language is, again, all-inclusive.
- **Philippians** – again, the language is entirely inclusive. All men and women were to listen and take action. 'Bishops' and 'deacons' are mentioned, but with no gender distinction.
- **Corinthians** – likewise, inclusive language permeates these letters. There are, however, 2 passages in here that discuss gender distinctions: 1 Cor 11:2-16 (heads and head coverings), and 1 Cor 14:34-35 (women should keep silence). The first has a separate book on it by the same authors as this one, entitled '1 Corinthians 11:2-16 – Headcovering in Bible Times and the Application Today'. The second is discussed in Chapter 8 of this book. *However*, the overall flavour of Corinthians is still all-inclusive.
- **Romans** – Romans states clearly that men and women alike have God-given gifts, and they should use them.
- **Colossians** and **Philemon** – no surprises here. Colossians, in fact, spends quite a while discussing how all human divisions are transcended in Christ.
- **Ephesians** – Ephesians has much to say on the marriage relationship, and how Jesus' teaching is applied in family and household relationships. The principle expounded on this subject is to act in love, and submit to one another 'out of reverence for Christ'. But as regards ecclesial activities, there is once again not a trace of gender discrimination.
- So those are Paul's letters from 48 to the early 60s AD (Timothy and Titus are considered later). They are quite in harmony with each other about gender roles – or the lack thereof – in the ecclesia. Only 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-12 seem to rebut this. These passages now get their own special sections for analysis.

8) 1 CORINTHIANS 14:34-35 IN CONTEXT

- It's not possible that Paul is contradicting himself here. What, then, is the right interpretation?
- **Orderly worship** – the passage appears in the middle of Paul's instructions about orderly worship. Verse 33: 'God is not a God of disorder but of peace' sums it up. Paul begins

by saying that *all* (all!) should speak, but in turn. Then comes the ‘women keep silence’ bit, assuming that women are worshipping in a disruptive fashion. *My problem with this interpretation is that ‘they are not allowed to speak’ (verse 34) is an utter, complete contradiction of ‘everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction’ (verse 26).*

- **It’s a quote and Paul refutes it** – *I love this interpretation. When viewed in this way, the whole chapter suddenly fits together spectacularly well!* It would render this chapter in harmony with the rest of Paul’s writings. To list the reasons why:
 - The sudden switch from ‘you’ to ‘them’ is awkward – but if it’s a quote, it makes sense!
 - Paul has often quoted others elsewhere in Corinthians, so a quote is not unusual.
 - Paul has just stated that *everyone* is to speak, and has made it clear in other places that there is no male/female division. A contradiction? Or a *quote*?
 - ‘as the Law says’ does not sound like Paul *at all*. He has repeatedly said elsewhere that we are not under law!
 - ‘they should ask their husbands’ is highly patriarchal. A typical Judaiser thing to say!
 - ‘it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church’ is also a blatant Judaiser attitude.
 - the comments following this passage begin with a strong cry of ‘What!’, followed by sarcasm. Yes, sarcasm. As if Paul is biting back against what he’s just quoted.
 - *personally, I think this interpretation is sound. It blows the whole issue out of the water.*
- **No talking please** – this interpretation suggests that some women (not the ones involved in worship) were talking during the meeting and thus being disruptive. Apparently this was not at all uncommon in synagogues. *Not a bad interpretation, but it doesn’t fit quite as neatly as the quote/refute view.*
- **It was added later** – either by Paul himself, or perhaps a critic of his. This is because some manuscripts have v34-35 after v40. But, the verses have always been present *somewhere*. *I think this interpretation is unlikely.*
- Those are the main interpretations. An interesting point is that we all feel it needs special interpretation – no-one has ever taken this one at face value, as Christadelphian women do sing and talk!
- The booklet concludes that the section is basically a ban on disorderly worship. *I prefer the quote/refute explanation, but either way – women were never intended to do nothing but listen quietly all the time.*

9) PAUL’S LETTERS TO TIMOTHY AND TITUS

- Moving on to Timothy and Titus, it is first important to know their context.
- While it has been suggested that these letters describe how ecclesias should be run in general, actually *reading* them clearly reveals that Paul was addressing *specific* problems that *specific* ecclesias had. (We can learn from this because the basis behind his arguments is rock solid Christianity.)
- These ecclesias were struggling with issues like restrictive laws, myths, gossip, gnosticism, false teachers and immorality.

- Gnosticism was a particularly dangerous threat, just beginning to arise. It taught that some had ‘divine knowledge’ – that the God of the OT was evil, and that morality as taught by God was, in fact, immorality! Paul’s comments on myths, fables and false teachers in Timothy and Titus clearly relate to such attitudes.
- Timothy himself was in Ephesus, a city supposedly founded by the Amazons, famous women leaders who had slain their fellow men. Ephesus was dominated by the worship of Artemis – a Greek goddess who was a powerful huntress and murderer of men. Artemis gloried over her conquering of males, and this scary female-power attitude would have been really influential. Paul even mentions ‘manslayers’, the word used to describe the Amazons – a coincidence? Or a real challenge the Christians were facing?
- The ‘women shall be saved through childbearing’ line actually makes sense for the first time ever! The Greeks prayed to Artemis when a woman was giving birth, that she might live through it. Paul is refuting that practice!
- Women’s clothing in that day had a lot to say about the woman wearing it. A woman in gold or purple was automatically assumed to be sexually promiscuous. So the clothing thing was a big issue too.
- With this background in mind, we can analyse the male/female comments in Timothy and Titus more accurately.

10) PAUL’S TEACHING IN 1 TIMOTHY: PRAYER, QUARRELLING, DRESS

- We know that Paul wrote to Timothy with the intention of correcting problems he’d heard about.
- In this light, the verse about men (and here the word does refer only to males) praying ‘without anger or quarrelling’ makes sense. This must have been an issue with some of the men. We know from 1 Cor 11 that Paul does approve of women praying publicly, so to use this verse as an assertion that women shouldn’t pray is pretty ludicrous.
- Immediately following the bit with men and prayer, comes ‘likewise’, and the bit with women and dressing modestly. No verb is given, so the two possible verbs to be carried over with ‘likewise’, are ‘[I] desire’ or ‘should pray’. It’s therefore either ‘I desire women to dress modestly’, as most people accept; or, ‘I desire that when they pray, women should be dressed modestly’.
- It doesn’t really matter which it is. The spirit of it is that prayer should be done properly, not ‘with anger’ as the men tended to do, or with immodest/promiscuous attire as the women tended to do. Furthermore, this passage doesn’t provide a leg to stand on for those with a ‘women shouldn’t pray’ perspective. That’s not at all the spirit of what Paul is saying.
- Leading on immediately from this, then, is the bit with women and learning/teaching.

11) PAUL’S TEACHING IN 1 TIMOTHY: LEARNING, TEACHING, AUTHORITY

- 1 Tim 2:11-15 are famously difficult and often debated. The spirit of it suggests it is about an immediate problem that needs correcting.
- ‘Let a woman learn in silence with full submission’. This is pretty straightforward, actually. ‘In silence’ is the word rendered ‘quietness’ elsewhere; it refers to learning in library-like quietness, *not* without speaking at all. ‘Full submission’ is something *all*

believers are called to – ‘be subject to one another’ (Eph 5:21). It’s actually revolutionary in that it suggests a woman *should* learn!

- ‘I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man’ – this has a great variety of translation possibilities, depending on grammar, linking of verbs, and if it refers to ‘men and women’ or ‘husbands and wives’. What *is* clear, is that the surface reading apparently contradicts Paul’s instructions elsewhere that women should teach if willing and able. To reconcile this verse therefore, four possible interpretations are put forward.
- **1) Private and public contexts** – it is suggested that Paul approved of women teaching in a private place, but not in public. Both Greeks and Jews found women teaching publicly to be unacceptable.
- **2) It was one particular Ephesian woman** – the text is in the singular; it may have been a general way of speaking, or perhaps there was a specific woman who was problematic. Paul might not have wanted to name her directly; he speaks this way of others elsewhere.
- **3) Husband and wife** – possibly, the verse is directed to husbands and wives rather than men and women generally. This would make more sense, considering wives were often uneducated teenagers married to much older, more educated men. It’s therefore really quite logical that of course the wives should learn from their husbands, not the other way around.
- **4) It refers to immoral/misleading teaching** – a look back to 1 Tim 1:6-7 shows that Paul is writing in a context where the spiritually uneducated were teaching others. Various verses suggest that perhaps even the majority of the women were unhelpful at best, and dangerous at worst, because of their spiritual immaturity. Of course Paul would try to stop such behaviour.
- *Of these four interpretations I find myself leaning toward the third (husbands and wives), just because given the context of the time, it’s entirely logical.*
- Moving on to the next part of the verse, we get ‘She is to keep silent’. This ‘silent’ we have already encountered – it’s really ‘in quietness’. It could also mean that she is to refrain from speaking Gnostic ideas, which might tie in to the next bit – a reference to Genesis. Read on.
- ‘For Adam was formed first, then Eve’. What is the point of this comment? Three interpretations are suggested.
- **1) Because Adam was made first, he has a divine leadership right** – this is an assumption, not at all based on scripture. *(Second-borns often ended up as God’s chosen ones anyway – ‘the elder will serve the younger’ etc)* The animals were made before people, too. So this one isn’t it.
- **2) Because Adam was made first, God taught Adam first, then Adam taught Eve.** This is suggesting that, because Adam had more experience than Eve, it was logical that he should be her teacher. This parallels with older men having younger wives, the way it was in Paul’s day – so Paul is simply drawing a comparison.
- **3) Paul is combatting the false teaching in Ephesus that Eve was the greater being.** This has already been looked at – in Ephesus, the worship of Artemis, the man-slaying goddess, would have been very influential. Perhaps here, Paul is simply stating the actual Bible truth.
- ‘Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived’ comes next. Again, three interpretations are:
- **1) All women are easily deceived, like Eve.** *This is preposterous. Nothing else to say.*

- **2) It is a parallel with what was happening at Ephesus.** The younger and spiritually wayward women could lead the more experienced men astray, quite like Eve with Adam.
- **3) It is a reminder that Eve was a sinner.** Some beliefs held that Eve was ‘the originator of life’. Paul squashes this notion.
- Finally, there’s the ‘saved through bearing children’ line. This has already been considered. It will always be an unusual and unclear verse, and really no-one can say for sure what it means. Does it refer to the dangers of childbirth? To Mary and Jesus? *I still personally hold that it is a refutation of the idea that Artemis ‘saves’ (protects) women through the process of childbirth.*
- The book offers a paraphrase of this passage (1 Tim 2:11-15), that picks up on some of these interpretations and thereby makes it much more understandable (see page 80 of the book). *My own interpretation would be something like this: ‘Young wives, in need of spiritual instruction, should learn quietly. They shouldn’t be doing what some women of Ephesus do, dominating and leading their husbands astray with claims about woman being before other creations. Because unlike those pagan myths, we know it was actually Adam who was formed first, and Eve herself was a sinner, not ‘the originator or life’. Women should not be so foolish, therefore, to appeal to Artemis to save them through childbirth. Arm yourself instead with faith, love, holiness and modesty.’*
- The bottom line is that, because of the obscurity of this passage, it shouldn’t be used as an argument in the debate about the roles of sisters. It’s simply unclear. Note also that Paul says nothing to women who *are* capable teachers. And certainly today, when women can speak freely in society, holding women back is really a hindrance to the gospel. *(I’ve certainly seen that trying to preach to my own women friends – they are immediately put off when they read ‘women are to keep silent’.)*

12) TRANSLATION ISSUES

- Never forget that what we read in our English Bible is a translation from Greek, and there are no two languages which translate perfectly, word for word, and with exactness of meaning carried over. *(Best example I can think of is ‘otsukaresama’ in Japanese, which has no English translation; all you can do is explain the feeling behind it. Good night, thanks for all your work, sorry for leaving before you, it was fun, don’t wear yourself out – all conveyed in the one word.)*
- It’s handy (but obviously wrong) to pick the translation that best suits your beliefs. This chapter instead aims to show that many of the Greek words so far encountered have a few possible translations – and depending on which you choose, the outcome can be very different.
- A classic example: ‘aner’ means either ‘man’ or ‘husband’; ‘gyne’ means either ‘woman’ or ‘wife’. And so we have, in 1 Tim 2:12, ‘I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man’, *or*, ‘I permit no wife to teach or to have authority over her husband’. The difference is huge! One is very broad, and the other is in the context of marriage.
- The ‘have authority’ in this verse is another tricky one. The word is ‘authentein’, and in the New Testament it is used here and only here, so there’s nothing with which to compare it. The usual word for authority is ‘exousia’, but Paul chooses not to use it here. Why? Apparently, there is no agreed meaning for ‘authentein’ among scholars – which the book describes at length.

- Possible meanings include ‘have authority’, in a good sense; ‘dominate’, in a bad sense; or even something as far out as ‘claim to be the originator of’. We simply don’t know which is right.
- The bias of the translator is, unfortunately, often the final decider. Those who favour the involvement of women in the church tend to say it’s ‘dominate’, the bad sense. Those who think women shouldn’t be involved in the church tend to say it’s ‘have authority’, in the good sense.
- The authors of the book take the bad sense view, ‘dominate’, in light of the fact that the Bible as a whole promotes teaching by Christlike men and women alike; and the ‘dominate’ view is in harmony with this. *I agree.*

13) PAUL’S TEACHING ON BISHOPS, ELDERS, DEACONS

- We know that leaders were appointed in the churches to care for them. A few different names are used – overseers/elders (possibly interchangeable), bishops, and deacons. Sometimes, it’s plain that these leaders were men only (‘the husband of one wife’), but in other places, it’s likely that women were included too. For example, Phoebe is said to have been a deacon. However, having only men in the roles with public profiles would make sense for the day.
- By the 2nd century, a hierarchy (bishop, elders, deacons) had developed, but this isn’t seen in the New Testament.
- Overseers were teachers; elders had pastoral duties; deacons had practical jobs, among other things. But this is based on very few quotes for evidence. Perhaps their work was overlapping and shared. It really can’t be said for certain.
- Older women are to be ‘teachers of what is good’ (see Titus 2:3-5). This passage is sometimes read as meaning that older women should only teach younger women. But a closer look reveals that they are to have good qualities of character, one of which is to be ‘teachers of what is good’ – in order to be in a position to lead younger women. There is nothing to suggest that they could *only* teach younger women, and not men. That is a presumption.
- In all this, Paul’s primary concern is that church leaders should be upright and exhibiting moral *behaviour*. The gender of these leaders is incidental.
- If the leaders at the time were all male, it is not surprising, considering that in those days that would have been seen as honourable – and we are instructed to appear as creditable before others, so that the gospel might likewise appear creditable to them. But the measures taken to appear creditable in those days obviously don’t apply today – it’s a different world now! – and nor were those measures ever meant to be lasting arrangements for all time.

14) 2 TIMOTHY: FAITHFUL PEOPLE ARE TO TEACH

- 2 Timothy is probably (and sadly) Paul’s last letter. If ever he were to give a final word on teaching, we’ll find it in 2 Timothy.
- Timothy learned the gospel from his mother, who in turn learned it from her mother. Paul speaks warmly of this. Interesting to keep in mind when reading 1 Timothy 2!

- But back to 2 Timothy, we find in 2:2 ‘... entrust (the gospel) to faithful *men* who will be able to teach others also’. ‘Men’ here is ‘anthropoi’, meaning both men and women. The NRSV puts it nicely: ‘... entrust (the gospel) to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well’.
- And doesn’t that just make sense? Some would argue that ‘anthropoi’ here means only men, that is, the elders and bishops who taught in those days. But if Paul meant that, why not use ‘andres’ (men)? Instead, he uses the very general ‘anthropoi’, which he uses elsewhere over 50 times, *always* meaning ‘men and women, people, humans, mortals’. Sometimes it is used in reference to a group of men only, but in those cases, the fact they are men is not the point. *It’s like someone saying that the word ‘people’ must mean men only, because they heard someone refer to a group of men as ‘people’. It’s missing the point entirely.*
- Paul’s final word on teaching? It’s for *faithful people*. And yes, that means both men and women!

15) THE REMAINING BOOKS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Relevant passages from the other New Testament books will now be considered. Remember that ‘adelphoi’, often translated as ‘brethren’, does in fact mean ‘brothers and sisters’.
- **Hebrews** – all believers are instructed to encourage one another, offer praise, and draw near to God. No gender distinctions here. Leaders, likewise, are spoken of in a gender-neutral way.
- **James** – no gender distinctions here either. We can see clearly here how masculine terminology encompasses both male and female, in ‘Is *any* among you sick? Let *him* call for the elders...’ – it’s simply silly to assume sick women couldn’t also call for the elders’ help!
- **1 Peter** – there are some very interesting points in here. Believers, both male and female, are described as a holy priesthood, all in together. Everything done, should be done to glorify God. In all this, no gender distinction is drawn. Women are instructed to be submissive even to their pagan husbands, *so that* they might win them for Christ. Husbands are to honour their wives as the weaker sex (which, physically speaking, is quite true). But, husbands and wives are *joint heirs* at the end of the day. Elders (males) also get a mention in 1Peter, where they are told not to ‘domineer’ (not the word ‘authentein’).
- **Revelation** – also very gender-neutral in regard to teaching. In 2:20, we find a reference to Jezebel, who was claiming to be a prophetess and was teaching false doctrine. The objection here is that she was *claiming* to be a prophetess (she wasn’t), and she was teaching *the wrong things*. Nothing is said along the lines of ‘what’s a woman doing prophesying and teaching anyway?’ The issue is with this one wayward woman. *The point is missed when the reader focuses on Jezebel’s gender, rather than on the real issue – her occupation as a false prophet. I imagine that if Jezebel were male, then aside from changing the gender of the words, the passage would be exactly the same.*

16) VARIOUS CONCLUSIONS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

- **Paul's letters** – it is concluded that the 'difficult' passages relating to the roles of women are indeed 'difficult', and should be read in the light of clearer teaching – where Paul makes no distinction between genders. *Though frankly, I am quite satisfied with some of the interpretations of the 'difficult' passages expounded in this book.*
- **On the New Testament in general** – elders are often represented to be men only, however, this would have been necessary given the male-dominated world of the first century. It is important to recognise that this was a new Christian world, growing in a pagan environment. *The ideal could not practically be fully realised.*
- Over the centuries, it's been passed along that women are to play restricted roles (*but the Trinity doctrine has been passed along through the centuries too, so the time test alone is not a measure of truth*). 1 Cor 11 (head coverings), 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2 are quoted as proofs that women are to be silent and submissive. But, over the course of this study, we have seen a different understanding; one where men and women stand together before Christ in humility and faith. Which understanding is more in tune with Jesus' attitude? The context and restrictions of the first century must be taken into account. We wouldn't re-introduce slavery. Why would we re-introduce the male-oriented ways of the Roman empire?
- What fits with the spirit of the New Testament? Jesus taught us about freedom. He came to 'set at liberty those who are oppressed'. He freed us from sin, so we are free to serve God and each other. It is right for all to pour their ability into God's service, not hold back because of their gender.
- So let's do it. Let's apply these principles *appropriately* for our time, where women no longer live under societal restrictions like those in the first century. Let's aim for the ideal, in harmony with the spirit of the New Testament, where in Christ, there is no male or female.
- And if you think the Old Testament rebuts all this, then keep an eye out for chapters 17-24 on the Old Testament!

Please note that this document gives a quick summary. For a full explanation as to how and why the conclusions are reached, please look at the detailed account in 'All One' itself.