

ALLIANCE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Reflection Paper on *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* by Kevin Giles

Submitted to Dr. Shellrude

Reading the New Testament

NT503

by

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In this reflection on *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women* by Kevin Giles I hope to summarize some of the main points, highlight where I agree and disagree, and share what my findings mean for me going forward. This conflict between Complementarian and Egalitarian theology is of extreme relevance not only in Christian circles today but also in my life as a single woman in Seminary. For the last few years I have seen arguments online and read articles about abuses of power by men in the Church. I have read absurd articles and comments written about women like Beth Moore who dare to shed light on this abuse. Giles first mentions this on page 30 when he highlights the conflict within the Southern Baptist Convention ¹. This abuse isn't just a Southern Baptist issue. All over the world and for centuries, men have used what they believe the scriptures teach to demean, harm, and control women. Having an awareness of this sparked great interest in the topic for me.

Coming from an Assemblies of God church it has always been normal for me to see women preaching, teaching, and prophesying in the church. However, when it came to marriages and households, the church leaders that I have been under have believed in the complementarian view that women are under the authority of their husbands. I now understand that this mindset comes from their understanding of passages like Ephesians 5:22-24, but also from latino culture. In and outside of the church I have seen "machismo" run rampant in my community and in my family. This contrast between giving women platforms in the church and silencing them in their own homes has caused much conflict for me and I looked forward to hearing Giles' arguments for this reason.

¹ Giles, K. (2018). Page 30. In *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, Cascade Books.

At the start of my reading I found the clarification on definitions to be helpful. It is important to clearly define terms because ideas are often misrepresented today. One example of this that Giles clarifies is that as an Egalitarian he agrees that there are differences between males and females. Rational thought is so far and few between that some people today actually argue that there are no differences. They claim that women are equally as physically strong as men and attribute any actual differences to nurture over nature. Many conservative believers lump Egalitarians and those with the previously mentioned view in the same category, dismissing them immediately.

Another term that has been misrepresented is feminism. Somehow this has become an evil word in the evangelical world when by definition it is simply a belief in equality between the 2 sexes. Many have come to believe that feminism leads to the elimination of men and masculinity all together. The widespread legalization of abortion, the divorce rates, and other societal issues are often blamed on feminism. On page 42 Giles states that "None of the ills of modern society can be attributed solely to feminism. They are rather a consequence of the profound societal changes that have taken place in the last fifty years, of which the liberation of women is just one."² With an untainted understanding of what it means to be an Egalitarian we can move towards addressing the root issue: what does the Bible actually say about women, and how should that inform how we live?

2 Giles, K. (2018). Page 42. In What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women, Cascade Books.

Chapter 4 breaks down the creation account in Genesis 1-3. If we are to discover the truth about God's design for men and women, we should clearly start at the origin. Giles spends much of this book referencing the book *God's Design* by Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger. He makes it plain that he is writing to disprove or respond to their Complementarian views. They seem to make many claims and lean on inferences made from their perspective without acknowledging the many Egalitarian arguments. One of the claims they make is that Genesis chapter 2 supplements the creation account in chapter 1 and shows Adam and Eve having different roles. Of course Giles disagrees with this and claims that the chapters complement each other and say the same thing. Both men and women are made in the image of God, having equal status, yet being different.

He makes a great point in referencing verses like Matthew 19:4-6 where Jesus refers to both Gen 1 and 2 in the same statement as if they are one. Complementarian scholars use chapter 2 of Genesis to support their viewpoint. They believe that because Adam was created first and named Eve and the animals, this made him an authority. They also claim that because Eve was the one deceived by the serpent, this implies that women are weaker and more prone to sin. These are important claims because as previously stated, what Genesis actually teaches will make or break each argument. Giles responds to 7 of these inferences with great rebuttals that support the view that the subordination of women came after the fall and was not God's original design. Thus it is not the ideal and should not be viewed as such in our world today.

In response to the idea that because Eve was created second she has a subordinate role, Giles states that order does not always indicate status. "Man and

woman are created last and yet stand at the apex of God's creative work". When it comes to Eve being Adam's "helper", we know that helping does not automatically indicate subordination to them. Eve was his equal helper. I believe Giles' main argument can be summed up by his writing on page 64 where he states "The rule of the man over the woman is depicted as entirely a consequence of sin and as such not pleasing to God and definitely not the God-given ideal. It is descriptive of life in a fallen world: not prescriptive."³ In this, it is implied that the ideal is important. The original design of equality between the man and the woman was called good by God. Our interpretation of Genesis 1-3 will influence our interpretation of the later texts. With this in mind, we move on into what Jesus' life and teaching tells us about women.

If we believe that Jesus is in fact God, as a member of the trinity, the way that He lived carries significant implications. We ought to interpret the rest of scripture through the lens of what the God-man says and does. Some might claim that Jesus never explicitly talks about whether women should hold ministry titles, or if they ought to be homemakers who are under the authority of their husbands, but we can draw some conclusions based on his actions. This isn't a unique issue in scripture. There are many topics that are not directly addressed in simple statements but by actions. Giles makes this point on page 78 where he highlights several subjects that Jesus takes a stand on. He never says not to observe the Sabbath but by healing on the Sabbath and breaking the "rules" He made a statement about what truly matters. These actions led the early church to stop observing the Sabbath even though Jesus never explicitly said to.

3 Giles, K. (2018). Page 64. In What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women, Cascade Books.

When it came to women, Jesus' actions "undermined the prevailing idea that women were the subordinate sex".⁴ The simple act of talking to women was scandalous considering that Jewish men only spoke to their wives or women in their family. Giles goes on to highlight the multiple occasions where Jesus interacts with women in ways that were not considered normal. Even in my own reflection on the scriptures and the stories that I know, so many of the people that Jesus went out of his way for were women. These are some of the most impactful stories to me. Included in this are the woman with the issue of blood, the woman at the well, the Syrophenician woman and her demon possessed daughter. With the woman at the well, not only were his disciples shocked to see him talking to her, she was surprised as well. He doesn't make their conversation solely about her failures as a woman or her fornication. He offers her living water and life in Him. Not only that, he uses her to preach to the people of her community and to draw more women and men to himself.

On marriage, Jesus points to the ideal in Genesis 1-2. When writing about Matthew 19 and Jesus' comments on divorce, on page 82 Giles writes "He answers in terms of the God-given nature of marriage. In doing so he makes a contrast between the creation ideal and the realities of fallen existence, and gives priority to the creation ideal"⁵. Marriage is meant to be a mutual partnership and in his response Jesus does not give men an easy-out of that partnership.

When we look at his relationships with women in his life it's clear that Jesus values them and trusts them with responsibilities. Even the Kostenbergers agree that

⁴ Giles, K. (2018). Page 78. In What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women, Cascade Books.

⁵ Giles, K. (2018). Page 82. In What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women, Cascade Books.

“by appearing first to a woman, the risen Jesus implicitly challenged the patriarchal culture of his day that did not consider women as viable legal witnesses”.⁶ Giles points out that throughout the Gospels and in Luke especially we see women in places of prominence. One of those is Anna (Luke 2:36-38) who is called a prophet. She spoke to all about the child that had come to redeem God’s people. Prophecy and proclaiming the word of the Lord is never limited to men. Acts 2:17-18 says

“In the last days, 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. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy.”

Now, I cannot ignore one of the arguments that has been a challenge for me to understand. This is the fact that Jesus chose 12 men as his disciples. Though he does not in any way state that only men can be disciples or can lead, I have wondered why he didn’t include some women in the 12. On page 88 Giles provides some possible reasons why. Again, it probably has much to do with God working within the cultural norms of the time. Women could not live nomadically and travel for long amounts of time as freely as men at this time. There were women who followed Jesus but not for the entirety of his ministry journey.

Another reason Giles gives is that the testimonies of women at the time were not valued. If the 12 were to bear witness, only men would be trusted at this time. Of course Jesus did not view the testimony of women as something to be disregarded, because we know that he appeared to women first after the resurrection, but he did operate and

⁶ Köstenberger Andreas J. (2014). Page 107. In *God's Design for Man and Woman: A biblical-theological survey*. Crossway.

fulfill his mission within the culture of the time. Overall Giles does provide reasoning that gave me a better understanding on the subject, though this is not the only element in scripture that I have felt conflicted about. The writings of Paul seem to show contradictory views on women when read at face value. Sometimes he acknowledges women as co-laborers like Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2), even calling her a deacon, Priscilla (Romans 16:3-5), and Junia (Romans 16:7), and other times he writes about women being quiet and submitted (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

This passage seems to contradict other parts of scripture. Giles acknowledges the contentiousness of this passage and writes at length about it starting at page 118. He first provides context regarding what churches were like at this time. They were not the formal gatherings in a building that most of us attend today. They met in homes and did not have a single pastor in charge or making all of the decisions. Giles makes the argument that this may have been a command to a particular group because of false teaching that was running rampant there.

This idea of women not speaking can't possibly be a command for all churches because we consistently see women prophesying, praying and teaching in other passages. In his conclusion Giles admits that there are things we don't know that make it difficult to answer every question about 1 Timothy 2:11-15. We do know that it is somewhat an anomaly and that as a whole the scriptures do not teach what it seems to imply. As he continues to dig into Paul's teaching, Giles breaks down a few more scandalous passages. Ephesians 5:21-33 has always been an interesting one to me because although it claims that the "husband is the head of the wife", it starts off by

calling for mutual submission in verse 21. It's important to mention that the definition of the word head (kephale) here is disputed by many.

In attempting to understand verse 23 Giles encourages us to consider the historical context. Because of their lack of education and everything that came with pregnancy and nursing children, women did rely on men for a lot. On page 157 Giles writes "Paul could not have imagined a world where more women than men had higher education, women could live independent lives, were in control of their own fertility, and could financially support themselves" ⁷. He writes within the context of the time he was in but still challenges the norm by calling men to give themselves up for their wives in the same way that Christ did for the church. This parallels the teaching of Jesus that the greatest leaders are servants who sacrifice. It is a call to lay aside their cultural superior status and serve their wives. It was already the norm in this society for women to serve their husbands and give of themselves. This life of service is required from both parties in marriages.

Perhaps one of the greatest arguments in this book is made in chapter 8 where parallels are made between how slavery and the subordination of women are written about in the scriptures. I have always heard believers argue that the bible does not condone slavery, it simply acknowledges it as a normal institution that existed at the time. Those same believers would not admit that the same can be said about the writings regarding men and women and the "male head-ship". Giles points out that many of the supporters of slavery were self proclaimed Christians who benefited from the system. This parallels his earlier claims that some men who support Complementarianism do so

⁷ Giles, K. (2018). Page 157. In *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, Cascade Books.

because they benefit from it. It is scary to think that we can so easily convince ourselves that something is true and use scripture out of context to support our preferred view. This is exactly what happened with slavery and perhaps what has happened with the subordination of women.

Though I do believe that we should be careful not to adjust our interpretation of scripture based on the culture of our time, I must admit that the changing of cultural norms can help us have a new perspective on how we interpret certain ideas. One example of this is the thinking that led to the abolition of slavery, causing most Christians to go from supporting slavery to viewing it as an injustice that contradicts God's original intent for humanity.

Once again we are pointed to what God's original design for humanity is, and this is where Giles ends. Chapter 9 talks about justice and God's desire for it to be done on the earth. This is an undeniable teaching. In Matthew 23:23 Jesus says

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former”.

Discrimination and preferential treatment are not pleasing to God. Jesus consistently shows this and welcomes the outsider into the family of God. In Luke 1:52 Mary sings about how Jesus will lift up the humble and bring down rulers. This speaks to an upside down kingdom where those that make it a point to be first and abuse their power will be brought low, while those considered last and lowly will be exalted. On page 207 Giles goes on to list ways in which the subordination of women has led to

injustices and inequalities. On 208 he states that “43.7 percent of African American women, 37.1 percent of Hispanic women, and 19.6 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander women have experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner”⁸. It is hard to deny that the view of women as inferior beings plays a role in this.

In closing, Giles has helped me gain a better understanding of the subject as a whole and has helped me to become more rooted in my views. God created something good when he created man and woman, each created in His image. I strongly believe that there are intrinsic differences between the 2, but this in no way means that one is superior to the other. The most fulfilled and beautiful marriages that I have seen are ones built on mutual respect, friendship, and partnership, and this is what Giles claims to have seen in his own life. I am prayerfully believing that more Christians will begin to see the beauty and benefits in pursuing relationships that model God’s ideal design.

⁸ Giles, K. (2018). Page 208. In *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, Cascade Books.