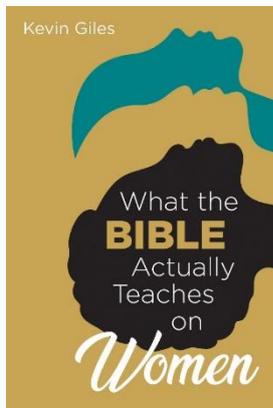


What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women

Kevin Giles

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This book is, in my opinion, the best book available today on the controversial topic of the status and ministry of women. It is wide-ranging in scope, very well researched and easy to read. The book is the fruit of Kevin Giles' forty years of careful study of the scriptures and of debates with those of counter-opinions both in Australia and on the international scene.

In *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, Giles makes his debating opponents Andreas and Margaret Köstenberger, the authors of the definitive complementarian book, *God's Design for Man and Woman*. While Giles and the Köstenbergers arrive at different conclusions, they have much in common. Alike they have a high view of the authority of scripture. Alike they have a high view of marriage and family life. Alike they make the scriptures their primary focus in seeking God's design for the man-woman relationship. Alike they care deeply for the wellbeing and witness of the church to the world. I found Giles's

engagement with the work of the Köstenbergers to be rigorous, yet respectful, gracious, and honouring. He strongly disagrees with them on many matters, but he does this in a way that acknowledges their scholarship and academic brilliance (p. 3). I would like to see all complementarian and egalitarians learn from Giles's approach when debating with other Christians on what the Bible actually teaches on the man-woman relationship.

Kevin Giles structures his book carefully. First, he asks why the equality of the sexes is so vigorously debated today. Giles considers the impact of feminism, women's educational advances, the increase in women in leadership positions in society, socially conservative evangelicalism, and the culture wars. Second, Giles outlines how the complementarian position as it is known today was invented by George Knight in 1977. In this, the creation-given 'roles' of men and women are made the central issue, which sounds innocuous until it is discovered that what is being argued in coded language is that God has assigned to men the ruling role and women the obeying role, and this hierarchical ordering of the sexes can never change. Third, Giles works his way through the key biblical texts and passages. He moves from God's ideal for essential gender equality in Genesis 1–3, to the way Jesus treated women with honour and respect in the Gospels and finally to Paul's affirmation of women in leadership. As Giles does this, he highlights the ministries of significant women in the Gospels, in Acts, and in the Pauline writings—including Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia, the woman apostle). When Giles gets to Paul, he naturally focuses on debates about the much-disputed meaning of the Greek words *kephalē* and *authentēin* and on 1 Timothy 2:12-14. Fourth, Giles documents how the Bible has been used in an identical way to uphold and defend oppression in the past, giving the examples of slavery and apartheid. Finally, Giles explores the sociological and institutional reasons why complementarians reject the biblical egalitarian position when it would be expected that all Christians would delight to see women set free by the gospel and empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the gospel.

Foundational to Giles' case for the substantial equality of the two sexes are the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. What God puts first in the Bible, he makes of first importance. For him, these chapters, more than anything else in scripture, reveal the God-given ideal for the man-woman relationship. He persuasively argues, with widespread scholarly support, that Genesis chapters 1 and 2 teach the substantial and essential equality of man and woman. It is only as a consequence of the fall that the man begins to rule over the woman (Gen 3:16). This means that the subordination of women is not the creation ideal but a reflection of sin. It speaks of the fallenness and brokenness of human relationships, not of the new creation in Jesus Christ. Giles says, 'This is not an idiosyncratic egalitarian interpretation of Genesis 1–3. It is what the majority of contemporary scholarly Protestant commentators conclude and what all Roman Catholic theologians and biblical scholars teach' (p. 66). Giles argues that a 'hermeneutical rule' is implied in these chapters, a way to interpret all that is said in scripture on the man-woman relationship. It is this:

'All texts that imply or speak of the substantial and essential equality of the two sexes reflect the creation-given ideal; all texts that imply or speak of the subordination of women reflect the fall. They are not the God-given ideal. They either mirror the culture of the time or give practical time-bound advice to women living in a world where their subordination is assumed, or address an exceptional situation where the behaviour of some women is causing offence.'

He then adds, 'All evangelicals who want to uphold the theological unity of Scripture should be pleased to embrace this rule' (p. 67).

What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women is a robust, scriptural, and systematic examination of what the Bible teaches on women. This book should be read by everyone who cares about the wellbeing, integrity and witness of the church and wants to see the leadership abilities of women unequivocally affirmed. It is undeniable that Jesus and Paul affirmed the dignity and leadership abilities in women in ways hitherto unknown and foreign to all forms of patriarchy. Their words and example are a challenge for the church today as we seek to be faithful witnesses to the gospel.

Graham Hill, Vic.