

# Exploring God's Design for Gender Roles in Church Leadership

An In-Depth Look into a Biblical Perspective



## Contents

Introduction.....	3
Not a Black & White Issue.....	4
Not an Issue of Biblical Faithfulness versus Cultural Accommodation.....	5
Not an Issue of Ontological Value.....	5
Exploring Scripture.....	7
The Center of the Debate: 1 Timothy 2:11-15.....	7
“I Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach...” (1 Tim 2:12a).....	9
The Context of the Corinthian Church.....	10
In All Things, Love and Order! (1 Cor 12:1-14:40).....	11
Tongues, Prophecy, and Teaching: Understanding Paul’s Categories.....	12
Women Should Remain Silent? (1 Cor 14:33b-35).....	14
Example: Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24-26).....	15
To Teach or Not to Teach? Returning to 1 Timothy 2:11-15.....	17
Summary: Freedom for Women to Teach.....	17
“I Do Not Permit a Woman to... Hold Authority Over a Man.” (1 Timothy 2:12b).....	18
Corinthians Caps: Fashion Faux Pa or Symbolic Statement? (1 Cor 11:2-16).....	19
Example: Female Authority.....	24
Deacons And Elders In Ephesus.....	25
Elders / Overseers / Pastors: What Do They Do?.....	26
Elders / Overseers / Pastors: Who Are They Today?.....	27
Summary: Freedom For Women To Lead.....	28
Culturally Specific or Universal Truth? Paul On Adam And Eve.....	28
1 Timothy 2:11-15.....	28
1 Corinthians 11:2-16.....	31
1 Corinthians 14:33b-36.....	32
Summary: Embracing God's Design For Men And Women In The Local Church.....	33
Conclusion.....	34
Bibliography.....	36



*Credits:*

Most of the material in this document was written by Christ Community Evangelical Free Church of the Kansas City Missouri area under the title “Exploring God’s Design for the Role of Women in the Church”. The material is used in this document with permission.

*Abbreviations:*

**BDAG** – A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 3rd ed.  
**BECNT** – Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament  
**DBE** – Discovering Biblical Equality  
**ICC** – International Critical Commentary  
**LS** – Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon  
**NASB** – New American Standard Bible  
**NCBC** – New Century Bible Commentary  
**NICNT** – New International Commentary of the New Testament  
**NIGTC** – New International Greek Testament Commentary  
**NIV** – New International Version of the Bible  
**NIVAC** – New International Application Commentary  
**RBMW** – Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

*Exploring God’s for the Role of Women in the Church*  
Copyright © 2015 by Christ Community Evangelical Free Church  
April 2015 Revised September 2017

Requests for information should be addressed to:  
Christ Community Church, 10901 Lowell Ave, Suite 290, Overland Park, KS 66210

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, copyright © 1984 by Zondervan. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



# Introduction

---

Gender roles is a topic that has engaged our culture for over 150 years and continues to capture headlines today. These issues have also been at the center of debates within the evangelical church especially in the last 30 years with the emergence of Evangelical Feminism.

The dispute over gender roles is an issue that every church must thoughtfully navigate with much prayer and Biblical inquiry, and this paper reflects the attempt of our church to do just that.

*At Grace Gathering we have a commitment to maintaining biblical truth in all we do as a church including the roles of men and women. We also recognize that to restrict women from serving in roles that God would allow is just as much in error as not prohibiting women from roles that are not in line with God's word. We have wrestled through the many scriptures that address gender roles including 1 Tim 2:11-15, 1 Cor 11:2-10, 1 Cor 14:33-35, and Acts 14:24-26 recognizing that in none of these passages are gender roles explicitly defined. In our discussion and evaluation of the doctrinal truths of gender roles we have found no more complete and clear explanation of what we understand as God's heart in the matter than an article titled "Exploring God's Design for the Role of Women in the Church" written by the staff at Christ Community church in the greater Kansas City area. Rather than attempting to rewrite these truths, most of what we present in this paper is taken directly from the Christ Community paper. We are thankful to that church for sharing their insight and doctrinal scholarship and giving us the permission to use the material within our church. We have divided the original paper into three components including this doctrinal article, a two page summary and a group of Frequently Asked Questions. These last two documents serve as companions to this paper.*

*We as a church also value the promoting of freedom in secondary doctrinal matters. Although this paper represents the doctrinal position of the elders at Grace Gathering, we recognize that we can remain strong in the essential tenets of the faith, while valuing and promoting freedom in secondary matters which includes gender roles. We allow others who hold opposing opinions on this topic to worship freely at Grace Gathering noting that both sides of the debate can be defended through faithful interpretation of Scripture. It is in this vein that we wish to dialogue openly about this matter and seek an approach that is both Biblically responsible and God-honoring.*

The purpose of this essay is to expound our Biblical rationale for this position. To avoid confusion over terminology, it would be helpful to define at the outset the major positions involved. At the risk of oversimplifying, most positions on the role of women in the ministry of the local church



can be divided into two broad camps: those who limit ministry positions based on gender (Complementarian) and those who do not (Egalitarian).<sup>1</sup>

- *Complementarian* – This position suggests that it is God's creation design for men and women to fulfill different roles in the church (i.e., they complement each other); therefore some ministry positions should be restricted based on gender. Among Complementarians, there is a wide variance concerning what ministry roles ought to be restricted by gender, yet wherever the lines are drawn, Complementarians agree that gender-restrictions are valid for some ministry positions.
- *Egalitarian* – This position suggests that men and women are functionally equal and therefore no gender restrictions should be imposed on any ministry position within the local church. That is not to say that Egalitarians neglect patterns of authority in the home or church, but rather that these authoritative positions should not be gender-restrictive. In addition, it is quite possible to be Egalitarian as it relates to church life and Complementarian in regards to the operation of the home (or vice versa).

Understanding these terms will give us a shared vocabulary as we navigate these difficult waters. But before we begin this crucial study, a few brief caveats are in order.

## Not a Black & White Issue

While some matters of faith and practice are fairly clear in Scripture, some are left rather undefined and allow great flexibility in interpretation. This issue falls in the latter category. The fact of the matter is that, while there are verses that address gender issues, they do not always yield a consistent principle. For instance, if women are to “remain silent” in the church (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12b), why were they allowed to pray and prophesy (1 Cor 11:5)? If women are not to “teach or exercise authority over a man” (1 Tim 2:12a, NASB), why is Priscilla included in the doctrinal instruction of Apollos (Acts 18:26) or Deborah called to be a Judge exercising authority over Israel (Judg 4:4-5)? These matters will be dealt with in more detail below, but they suggest that the issue is not black and white. Whatever conclusions are made, they are tenuous at best, and alternative positions should be entertained and valued.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some have preferred to refer to these positions as the “Hierarchical” and “Feminist” positions respectively. The rationale for this renaming is to clarify that Egalitarians are not opposed to complementarity, and Complementarians are not opposed to gender equality. While this is certainly true, changing the terms does not eliminate the confusion. In fact, hierarchical and feminist terminology arguably carry with them even stronger negative connotations. Therefore, we have chosen to retain the traditional terms in this debate.



## Not an Issue of Biblical Faithfulness versus Cultural Accommodation

Unfortunately, this debate has often devolved into a question of which position takes the Bible more seriously. It has often been suggested that the Egalitarian position simply does not acknowledge the teaching of Scripture, but instead has caved-in to the cultural pressure to be “Politically Correct.” On the other hand, Complementarians are often accused of being chauvinistic and oppressive to women, advocating an understanding of Scripture that is blind to cultural advancements. Tragically, both caricatures are true in some cases. However, this should not cause us to assume that either position is inherently anti-biblical or anti-cultural. The fact is that both considerations are necessary. Any understanding of culture must be nuanced by the teaching of Scripture. But at the same time, any understanding of Scripture must also be influenced both by the culture to which it was written (the “historical context”) and the contemporary culture in which it is being related (the “contemporary context”). Both of these worlds intersect as we study Scripture, and neither should be studied without consideration of the other.<sup>2</sup>

## Not an Issue of Ontological Value

Furthermore, this is not a debate regarding the value of women. Here, it is helpful to make a distinction between ontological equality and functional equality (see Figure 1). Both Egalitarian and Complementarian positions affirm ontological equality. This simply means that one gender is not inherently more valuable than the other. In Genesis 1:26-27, God creates both male and female in his image. In the verses that follow, God blesses them both (1:28) and gives them both dominion over the creatures of the earth (1:29) and the earth itself (1:30). Thus, both of them are equally valuable God-imagers sharing in the cultural mandate.

Where these positions differ is over functional equality. Egalitarians argue that gender distinctions are insufficient grounds to limit one’s function in the local church. Complementarians, on the other hand, suggest that the

**FIGURE 1**

	Ontology (Who We Are)	Function (What We Do)
Egalitarian Position	Equality	Equality
Complementarian Position	Equality	Different roles in marriage and/or the church

<sup>2</sup> “Biblical literature has two dimensions: historical intentionality, in which the author assumes certain shared information with the original readers; and literary intentionality, in which he encodes a message in his text. ...While semantic research and syntactical analysis can unlock the literary dimension, background study is necessary in order to uncover that deeper level of meaning behind the text as well as within it. ...The cultural background not only deepens our understanding of the original text but also provides a bridge to the current significance of the text. A delineation of the customs presupposed or addressed in the text enable us to separate the underlying principles (the doctrines used to address the original context) from the surface commands (the contextualization of the deeper principles from the original situation).” Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 127, 134.



respective genders were created and empowered to fulfill certain roles, and that gender is precisely what qualifies them for these roles. It is this question of functional equality that we take up in the pages below – not ontological equality.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> As Ortlund notes, "There is no necessary relation between personal role and personal worth." Raymond C. Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3" in *RBMW* (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 111.



# Exploring Scripture

---

For the sake of time, space, and clarity, the focus of this paper is the issue of gender roles *within the ministries of the church*.

This distinction is important, as some individuals are Egalitarians in the context of church ministries, but maintain a degree of complementarity in the family. For this reason, not every Scripture passage that talks about men and women is applicable in this study, as some passages are clearly set in the context of the family rather than the church. We must take great care not to take a principle intended for one sphere of life (the family) and unduly force it into a different sphere (the church), unless we have strong interpretive grounds to do so.

## The Center of the Debate: 1 Timothy 2:11-15

That being said, we still have a number of verses and examples at our disposal, the most central of which is 1 Tim 2:11-15. Due to its direct nature and prescriptive language, this text provides a valuable framework for our study. Paul, writing to his young protégé Timothy in Ephesus, gives him the following instructions:

*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. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

In these frequently cited verses, Paul lays down two seemingly explicit prohibitions concerning the role of women in the church: they are not to teach, nor are they to exercise authority over men. However, the question is not about what these verses mean devoid of context. The more appropriate question is, what is Paul trying to communicate to the young pastor Timothy and how does that principle translate into a different (modern) context?

As mentioned above, Scripture must be read in light of its historical context in order to be interpreted properly. The difficulty with this, particularly as we study the New Testament letters, is that we must construct the historical context while only having half of the conversation! This has led some biblical scholars on both sides of the issue to read more into the text than can be definitively demonstrated.<sup>4</sup> We must be careful not to allow speculation to become the ground

---

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Moo, "What Does It Mean Not To Teach or Have Authority Over Men?" in *RBMW* (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 181.





of our position.

Nevertheless, as we read through this letter to Timothy, we can conclude quite a bit about the historical setting to which Paul was writing. Paul's central concern in this instructive letter is to teach Timothy "how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household" (3:15).<sup>5</sup> After a very brief word of greeting (1 Tim 1:1-2), Paul urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus for one particular reason – to repress false teachers in the Ephesian church (1:3-4).<sup>6</sup> There is much debate about what such false teaching included, but some aspects Paul specifically mentions are myths and genealogies (1:4), marital and dietary restrictions (4:3), and "wives' tales" (4:7, NIV). What is more significant than the *content* of the false teaching was its *cause* – a lack of knowledge and understanding (1:7; 6:3-4, 20; hence the repeated emphasis on the importance of teaching in 2:12; 3:2, 4:6-8, 11-16; 5:17). These blasphemous, ignorant beliefs had reached some rather prominent men in the church (1:19-20), and had tripped-up even some from among the highest level of leadership – the elders (5:19-22; this explains the significant amount of time devoted to the character qualifications of those serving as elders and deacons in 3:1-13). As a result, the church was a place of "quarreling" and "constant friction" (6:4-5, NIV), and some were "wander[ing] from the faith (6:21, NIV)." This church was in dire straits, and Paul was writing Timothy to encourage the young pastor to correct these false teachings through proper doctrine and proper practice.

The text in question, then (1 Tim 2:11-15), must be read against this backdrop. Apparently, the prevalent false teaching in the Ephesian church was creating "congregational contention."<sup>7</sup> It is not coincidental that Paul's comments in chapter 2 circulate around the notion of living quiet and peaceful lives. In response to the false teaching and the failure of Hymenaeus and Alexander (ch. 1), Paul gives instructions that would restore orderly worship within the household of God. First, that prayers should be offered, especially for those in authority (*hyperochē*), "so that we may live peaceful and quiet (*hēsychios*) lives" (2:2). Apparently, for one reason or another, these prayers caused "anger [and] disputing" (2:8) among the males in particular.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, Paul does not eliminate their responsibility to pray, but merely corrects the manner in which such prayers are offered.

Paul then turns his attention to concerns among the female gender.<sup>9</sup> First, he broaches a matter

---

<sup>5</sup> This verse seems to be the theme verse for the entire letter, as Paul devotes so much time to doctrine and conduct within the local church. Cf. Moo, "What Does it Mean" [*RBMW*], 180.

<sup>6</sup> It is safely estimated that roughly 50% of this letter confronts either the content or consequences of false teaching. Linda L. Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority," in *DBE* (eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 206.

<sup>7</sup> Linda L. Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority," [*DBE*], 207.

<sup>8</sup> Some have suggested that perhaps these prayers were turning into political platforms or the like. Again, we can only speculate. Regardless of the reason for such anger and disputing, it is clearly taking place; otherwise, Paul would not have needed to correct them. Cf. I. H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (ICC; New York: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 437.

<sup>9</sup> Belleville notes that "Women receive a great deal of attention in 1 Timothy. Indeed, there is no other New Testament letter in which they figure so prominently... All told, Paul's attention to false teaching and women occupies about 60 percent of the letter." Cf. Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority" [*DBE*], 207.



of appearance. It can be safely assumed that there was an issue of immodesty in the Ephesian Church, a city known for its brothels and loose sexual ethics. Such showy dress in the Ephesian culture (braided hair, flashy jewelry, fine garments, etc.) would identify a woman as being independent and perhaps even promiscuous. Thus, they must dress in a manner “appropriate for women who profess to worship God” (2:10).

It is at this point in his letter that Paul instructs women to “learn in quietness (*hēsychia*) and full submission” (2:11) and that, instead of teaching or holding authority over men, she must be “silent” (*hēsychia*, 2:12). The translation of the NIV is unfortunate here, for it appears as though “quietness” and “silent” are two different concepts, when in reality they are from the same root word (*hēsychia*). What is more, this same Greek root is used in 2:2, where “silent” is paired with “peaceful.” Surely, Paul is not suggesting that we live “silent lives!” Nor is he suggesting that women are not to speak in the church, but rather that they are to promote peace in the church by not being contentious, much like the males were instructed to do in 2:2 and 2:8.<sup>10</sup>

Paul makes an interesting division in verse 12 – one that is worth detailed consideration – between teaching and exercising authority, from both of which he restricts women from participating. For many Complementarians, this verse is the knock-out punch to the Egalitarian position. However, some questions must be raised for consideration. What does Paul mean when he uses the words “teach” (*didaskō*) and “exercise authority” (*authenteō*)? Was this Pauline command culturally based (and thus free to change as the culture changed) or is it a normative principle for all time? And what is the significance of the creation sequence in verses 13-15? These are questions that must be considered as we engage with the relevant texts.

## “I Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach...” (1 Tim 2:12a)

The first issue we must consider is Paul's intended meaning when he uses the word *didaskō* (“to teach”). What exactly was he restricting women from? The traditional answer is that Paul restricted women from expounding doctrine within the church.<sup>11</sup> But how do we know that from the text? And furthermore, what counts as “expounding doctrine”? May a woman teach doctrine to a male child? If so, at what age must she stop teaching him? May a woman explain a Bible verse as a part of her “testimony”? What if a woman were teaching another woman and a man overheard? May a woman lead corporate worship with males present (after all, aren't hymns just theology with a sound track)? What about evangelism and missions work – can a woman share the gospel with a male?

To help us navigate some of these issues, it is helpful to look at how Paul treats female involvement in the worship service elsewhere in Scripture.<sup>12</sup> We would expect that, if Paul were

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Moo, “What Does it Mean” [*RBMW*], 186.

<sup>12</sup> It is not insignificant to note that Paul's letters to Timothy were some of the last New Testament books written. Thus, if we wish to gain insight into what Paul is saying, it is wise to examine his positions earlier in his writings.



stating a universal decree concerning the role of women in the church, this operating principle would be consistently applied in other churches as well. And if there's one church that struggled with marital and gender role issues, it's the church in Corinth!<sup>13</sup>

## THE CONTEXT OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Much like its Ephesian counterpart, the Corinthian Church was also plagued by misguided leadership and unsound teaching. Paul had spent quite some time in Corinth during his second missionary journey (roughly two and a half years), but upon his departure, others began building on the foundation Paul had laid (1 Cor 3:10). The result was a church with divided allegiances, some “belonging” to Paul, some to Apollos, some to Peter, and the most “devout” belonging to Christ (1 Cor 1:12). These party spirits led to quarreling, divisiveness, and disunity in the Corinthian Church (1:10-11). It was not the allegiances themselves which Paul despised, but rather the claims that these allegiances offered their followers greater wisdom in the eyes of others (you could say the Corinthians were name- dropping). Paul offers them a corrective, for the cross is not a matter of “wisdom” as the world sees it, but foolishness (1:18-31). Nor is wisdom about the quality and eloquence of the speaker, but rather about the Spirit of God (2:1-16). It is not the teachers who give the gospel its credibility, nor is it the teachers who cause change in our lives – rather, it is God working through his Spirit (3:1-4:5).

This misunderstanding of wisdom resulted in a rather ignorant worldview. Corinth struggled with what one commentator has described as a “triumphalist, over realized eschatology.”<sup>14</sup> By this, he means that the Corinthian church was living as though the end had already come, the Kingdom of God had already been fully ushered in, and thus they were living like royalty (4:6-21). They had apparently turned a blind-eye toward sin, for they not only tolerated an incestuous relationship (5:1-13), they actually boasted of it (5:2).<sup>15</sup> They engaged in intercourse outside the bonds of marriage (6:12-20) and were in the practice of actually abandoning their marital vows (7:1-40). And their relationship with other believers had also suffered greatly, for they were engaged in lawsuits (6:1-11) and they caused others to stumble by abusing their freedom (8:1-11:1). This devaluation of others had even crept into their worship, as evidenced by inappropriate dress while participating in corporate worship (11:2-16), abuse of the Lord's Table (11:17-34), and using one's gifts as a means to gaining an upper hand within the church (12:1-14:40). In conclusion, Paul makes a final attempt to correct this “over-realized eschatology,” by pointing out that the resurrection of the dead had not yet taken place (15:1-58). If the kingdom had already fully come without the accompanying resurrection of the dead, then Christ had not been raised either and

---

<sup>13</sup> Marshall has done a superb work comparing the verbal parallels between 1 Tim 2:11-15 and 1 Cor 14:33b-35. Common themes that emerge among these two texts include: silence (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11, 12), prohibition of speaking/teaching (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11, 12), learning (1 Cor 14:35; 1 Tim 2:11), subjection of the woman (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11). I.H. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles [JCC]*, 439.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 345; cf. 239, 357-58, 744, 1029, 1173.

<sup>15</sup> They were probably not boasting of the sin itself, but rather its implications – perhaps something like, “look how accepting and loving our church is!”



our entire faith collapses (15:16-19)!

This church was not dabbling with some minor false teaching – their behavior was at risk of contradicting the gospel entirely!<sup>16</sup> But the area of greatest concern for this essay is how the divided leadership and lack of wisdom affected their practice as a worshipping congregation (11:2-14:40). These few chapters of Scripture contain two significant portions about the participation of women in the church gathering (11:2-16; 14:26-40), the latter dealing more with the participation of women in the worship service and the former dealing more with issues of authority (see below).

### **IN ALL THINGS, LOVE AND ORDER! (1 COR 12:1-14:40)**

One of the problems facing the Corinthian Church was an “ignorance” of their unity (12:1). Paul uses the now well-known analogy of the church as a body to overcome some of this apathy toward others. His point is rather simple: everyone in the church has been given specific gifts by the Spirit of God (12:7-11), these gifts are to be used for the good of the church body (12:7, 12-20), and the church cannot operate effectively without each one doing his or her part. Significantly, gender is not an issue in regard to the Spirit’s dispersion of gifts.<sup>17</sup> There is no indication that only men were given the gift of teaching, administration, prophecy, or speaking in tongues. In fact, everyone in the church is encouraged to “eagerly desire the greater gifts” without any mention of gender restriction at all (12:31; cf. 14:1).

Contrary to their apathetic attitude toward fellow church members (12:21), Paul offers another principle to govern our relationships with others – the principle of love (13:1-13). Each gift should be exercised, not to exalt oneself or to gain authority or to advance one’s own reputation, but rather as an act of love. Simply put, we are to “follow the way of love” in the expression of our gifts (14:1). Apparently, the prime area where love was needed was in the use of tongues in the Corinthian church, for they were being used in a way that marginalized those who could not understand the language being spoken. Paul responds by saying (1) that the greatest gift is in fact not tongues but prophecy, because it is intelligible and edifying to all who listen (14:1-12), and (2) that when tongues are spoken, they must be made intelligible through an interpreter (14:13-25).

In the verses that follow, Paul introduces a major theme that becomes the interpretive key for the rest of this chapter (14:26-40). Paul suggests that “the lifestyle and worship of the people of God” should reflect the “order in the nature of the God who acts coherently, faithfully, and without self-contradiction...”.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the church should reflect the orderliness of God. Thus, the verses that follow give some specific instructions regarding the exercise of the gifts of tongues and prophecy, for whatever is done in the worship service must be a reflection of the

---

<sup>16</sup> D.A. Carson & Douglass J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 415.

<sup>17</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 665.

<sup>18</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 1145. This is why Paul offers specific instructions on the practice of prophecy and tongues, because in all things order must be preserved (14:33a).



God of order (*taxis*; 14:40) and peace (*eirēnē*; 14:33a), not chaos (*akatastasia*; 14:33a).<sup>19</sup>

## TONGUES, PROPHECY, AND TEACHING: UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S CATEGORIES

Particularly significant for our discussion are the instructions for prophesying in the church gathering (14:29–33). However, in order to understand what this text says as a whole about the role of women in the church, we must first understand its parts.<sup>20</sup> When Paul refers to speaking in tongues and prophetic utterances, what does he have in mind? And how do these roles relate to teaching referred to in 1 Cor 12:28 and 1 Tim 2:12? Biblical scholars are divided on these issues, and, as you can imagine, this has been the focal point of much debate. Thankfully, Paul gives us some significant signposts in the book of 1 Corinthians to direct us toward a more accurate understanding of these gifts.

The debate around tongues usually centers on whether or not these strange languages were legitimate languages or simply a string of unrelated, incoherent syllables. This debate is beyond the scope of this essay, but some initial observations about speaking in tongues are necessary, as Paul spends a great deal of time contrasting tongues with prophecy. First, we note that tongues were “unintelligible” to the average person (14:2b, 9–12, 16), whereas prophecy was intelligible (14:3, 5). This is the primary reason that Paul favors prophecy to tongues in the corporate worship gathering (14:5). Second, tongues are not primarily directed toward humans, but toward God (14:2a, 13–17). Prophecy, on the other hand, is not for God but for humankind (14:3, 12). Finally, tongues are not a sign for believers, but unbelievers (14:22; cf. Acts 2:1–13), unless an interpreter is present. However, prophecy is for believers.

For these reasons, Paul considers prophecy to be “the most important gift for the community worship (14:1, 5).”<sup>21</sup> Prophecy, unlike tongues, was intelligible to all people – no interpreter necessary! Obviously, prophetic utterances by nature originated from God himself. However, we should not conclude from this that prophetic speeches were by necessity exclusively spontaneous.<sup>22</sup> While prophecy could be spontaneous words received during corporate worship (14:30), this does not suggest that this was always the case.

Prophetic speech is not opposed to thoughtful, sustained reflection; it is opposed to human origin. This is why Paul limits the number of prophetic speakers to “two or three” (14:29) and calls the rest to “control” their spirits (14:32). Paul is not discouraging prophetic speech, but more probably suggesting that additional prophetic speeches should be delivered at the next

---

<sup>19</sup> In fact, it seems likely that this theme is the major controlling factor throughout the entire section of 1 Cor 11:2–14:40.

<sup>20</sup> Fee suggests that any such attempt is feeble, “since the evidence is so meager.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 621. While this is a wise word of caution not to be overly dogmatic on any interpretation, we are still obliged to reconstruct the historical context as best we can given the evidence in the Biblical text.

<sup>21</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 583.

<sup>22</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 1091–92; Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 633.



gathering.<sup>23</sup>

Due to the fact these prophetic words/speeches were presumed to be the words of God, evaluation was necessary lest the congregation accept false doctrine. Thus, when someone delivered a prophecy, it had to be “weigh[ed] carefully” (14:29), lest the congregation accept false doctrine. This weighing carefully was necessary whether the prophecy was spontaneous or a result of careful preparation.

One final note about prophecy concerns its function. Prophecy in the New Testament church was not predominantly about predicting the future. It was about “edifying”/“building up”/“strengthening” (14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26),<sup>24</sup> “encouraging” (14:3, 31),<sup>25</sup> “comforting” (14:3),<sup>26</sup> and “instructing” (14:19, 31)<sup>27</sup> the congregation.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, merely “telling the future” is not what Paul has in mind here!<sup>29</sup> One commentator, Anthony Thiselton, argues convincingly that it is better to understand New Testament prophecy as a strong parallel to what modern churches consider “pastoral preaching.”<sup>30</sup> He summarizes the role of prophecy as follows:

*...prophecy, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, combines pastoral insight into the needs of persons, communities, and situations with the ability to address these with a God-given utterance or longer discourse (whether unprompted or prepared with judgment, decision, and rational reflection) leading to challenge or comfort, judgment, or consolation, but ultimately building up the addressees.<sup>31</sup>*

But if one of the forms of prophecy is to be understood as “pastoral preaching” – which included the ministry of instruction (cf. 1 Cor 14:19, 31) – then how does this differ from Paul’s category of

---

<sup>23</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 633.

<sup>24</sup> *oikodomē* (noun; 14:3, 5, 12, 26); *oikodomeō* (verb; 14:4, 17); also in 8:1, 10; 10:23. The NASB translates this word with the notion of “edification,” while the NIV favors “building up.” Both are adequate translations.

<sup>25</sup> *parakēsis* (noun; 14:3); *parakaleō* (verb; 14:31); also in 1:10; 4:13, 16; 16:12, 15. This word can also be translated “to exhort” or “challenge.” Thiselton has observed the strong correlation with this word and Pastoral practices, particularly Pastoral preaching. Cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 1088.

<sup>26</sup> *paramythia* (14:3).

<sup>27</sup> Paul uses two different words to convey this idea. *katēcheō* (1 Cor 14:19), which simply suggests the act of teaching/ instructing (BDAG, 534); *manthanō* (14:31, 35), which means “to gain knowledge or skill by instruction” (BDAG, 615, italics added). It seems fair to suggest that 14:6 also links teaching with prophecy (since revelation and instruction are also linked with prophecy in 14:30–31). If this assumption is correct, it may be significant that in 14:6 Paul uses another word for teaching (*didachē*) – the same word that Paul uses in his prohibition of women from “teaching” (1 Tim 2:12). Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 632.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton offers an excellent discussion on the nature of New Testament prophecy and its differences from speaking in tongues and teaching. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 1087–90.

<sup>29</sup> “Future-telling” could be part of a prophetic word or utterance (cf. Acts 11:28), but it is not necessary in order to qualify as prophetic. See Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 583.

<sup>30</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 1090. While he recognizes significant similarities between the two, he is also wise to retain some significant differences. “Few [modern] churches appear ‘to test’ preaching from the pulpit, and nothing suggests that early Christian prophecy was a sustained, uninterrupted, twenty-minute monologue delivered by a ‘trained’ speaker.” *Ibid.*, 961.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 964.





the ministry of “teaching” (i.e. 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Tim 2:12)? Again, Thiselton is extremely helpful here.<sup>32</sup> Prophecy, it seems, takes doctrinal truth and applies it to specific pastoral situations within the church congregation. Teaching, on the other hand, is not merely instruction or “pastoral preaching,” but rather has the role of establishing what is doctrinally accurate and what is not. This is particularly true within the context of NT teaching since congregations did not have the completion of the canon or copies of the NT. Thus much of the ministry of teaching is about *establishing* sound doctrine, whereas prophecy and even the use of the “gift” of teaching were about *applying* what is accepted as sound doctrine to practical situations. Teaching in this context is theology in abstract; Prophecy is theology applied. Thus, prophecy does not bear its own authority, but rather depends on what has been established (by the teachers) as doctrinally accurate. In the words of 1 Cor 14, it seems that the role of teachers is to “weigh carefully (*diakrinō*) what has been said [in prophecy]” (14:29).

### WOMEN SHOULD REMAIN SILENT? (1 COR 14:33b-35)

After Paul introduces the theme of orderliness in the worship gathering and offers some guidelines through which such order can be maintained, he then instructs women in the following manner:

*As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*<sup>33</sup>

The word “silent” (*sigāō*) calls to mind Paul’s instructions to Timothy, albeit that he employs a different word. We have already discovered that *hēsychia* (1 Tim 2:2, 11, 12) does not mean “silence”, but “peacefulness.” However, *sigāō* (1 Cor 14:34) does indeed seem to indicate silence (that is, “to say nothing”).<sup>34</sup> This certainly seems on the surface to be restricting women from any speech within the church gathering!<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, though, this word has often been interpreted apart from its broader context. In reality, Paul cannot here be forbidding women from prophesying, for in 1 Cor 11:5 he affirms women who pray and prophesy, provided they do so in a proper manner (i.e. with her head

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 1017-18.

<sup>33</sup> Fee has argued that 1 Cor 14:34-35 should be considered as “not authentic” — that is, they are a non-Pauline interpolation (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT], 699-708). However, this is a dubious claim considering that we have no extant manuscripts that omit these verses, in part or in whole. For an adequate defense of Pauline authenticity, see D.A. Carson, “Silent in the Churches’: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36” in *RBMW* (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 141-145. Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 666.

<sup>34</sup> BDAG, 922.

<sup>35</sup> Craig Keener notes that “...any church that permits women to participate in congregational singing recognizes that Paul was not demanding what a face-value reading of his words seems to imply: complete silence as a sign of women’s subordination. Thus almost everyone has a problem with pressing this text literally...”. Craig Keener, “Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,” in *DBE* (eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 161.



covered; we will examine what this means below).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, when the believers at Pentecost began speaking in tongues, the Apostle Peter cites this linguistic anomaly as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel, which foretells specifically of both men and women sharing in the prophetic role (Acts 2:17-18). Surely Paul would not overturn the fulfillment of God's word by mandating that women must not participate in the prophetic ministry! Wouldn't this contradict his assumption in 1 Cor 11:5, not to mention what he had said in 1 Cor 12-13 about the Christian's responsibility to exercise their spiritual gifts in love for others?<sup>37</sup>

A better understanding of what Paul is forbidding is indicated by the context, for Paul is speaking about a chaotic experience where multiple prophecies were being delivered and they were not being tested for accuracy. In 14:29, Paul gave the general principle for prophesying ("Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said."). In the verses that follow, he expands on these two elements – first, on how prophecies should be delivered (14:30-33a) and then on how they should be weighed (14:33b-36).<sup>38</sup> It is in this latter context of evaluation that Paul forbids a woman to speak. Thus Paul does not forbid female participation in prophetic ministries (and all that they entail as public speeches of edification, encouragement, comfort, and instruction), but rather he forbids participation in the weighing of such prophecies (that is, establishing what the church will recognize as sound doctrine). This context explains why Paul directs their "inquiries" to the husband (this assumes a circumstance in which inquiries would be easily prompted – in this case, unconfirmed prophecy).<sup>39</sup>

Paul's view of the involvement of women in the ministry of the local church was not repressive, but rather was actually greater than the culture around him. In other public assemblies (*ekklēsia*) women were completely forbidden from speaking, but in the Christian assembly (*ekklēsia*) women were encouraged to use whatever gift they had been given, even the Prophetic gift that Paul had identified as one of the "greater gifts" (1 Cor 11:5; 14:1).<sup>40</sup> What Paul restricts is not female participation in ministries such as teaching or "pastoral preaching," but the authority to decide what is sound doctrine and what is not.

### EXAMPLE: PRISCILLA AND AQUILA (ACTS 18:24-26)

If the thesis is correct that women were permitted and encouraged to use their prophetic gifts in the church (which included instruction), then we should expect to find some women exercising the role of instruction in the early church. While the argument can be made that it was rare for

---

<sup>36</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGNT], 1155-56.

<sup>37</sup> It is quite clear from this that women were permitted (and encouraged) to participate in the prophetic ministry, which includes an element of teaching. Note also that throughout 1 Cor 14, Paul consistently refers to "all"/"anyone"/"everyone" who prophesy and makes no gender distinction prior to 1 Cor 14:34-35 (see 14:2-3, 5, 13, 23-24, 26, 30-31, 37). Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 632-33.

<sup>38</sup> Carson, "Silent in the Churches" [RBMW], 152.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 153.





women to teach (evidenced by the lack of examples), it cannot be said that there are *no* examples. When Apollos came on the scene in Ephesus (prior to Timothy's tenure), it became clear that his theology was a bit deficient – he knew only of the baptism of John and not the baptism of Christ (Acts 18:25).<sup>41</sup> When Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak in the synagogue, “they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26).

A few points are worth noting. First, it should be noted that the word used here is not *didaskō* (“to teach,” which was used in 1 Tim 2:12) but *ektithēmi* (“to explain”). However, we should not conclude that Priscilla and Aquila were not teaching, per se, simply because a different word is used. The Greek language was not unlike the English language in its frequent use of synonyms. Later in the book of Acts, Paul is said to have “expounded (*ektithēmi*) to [the Jews in Rome], testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets” (Acts 28:23). Clearly, Paul was teaching and expositing Scripture (the Law and the Prophets) to these Jews. So the use of *ektithēmi* instead of *didaskō* does not indicate that Priscilla and Aquila weren't teaching.<sup>42</sup>

It also cannot be claimed that Priscilla was merely present and did not participate in the teaching, for the Greek verb is in the plural, indicating that they both participated in the action. Furthermore, it is unfounded to suggest that Priscilla's role in this teaching ministry was minor. It is an astounding fact that in virtually every reference to Priscilla and Aquila, Priscilla's name comes first (Acts 18:18, 19, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim 4:19).<sup>43</sup> As in our culture where Mr. usually precedes Mrs., so in Roman first-century culture the male was predominantly listed first.<sup>44</sup> What we have here is a dramatic reversal, where Priscilla has risen to a position of *prominence* in their role as “church planters.”<sup>45</sup> It should also be noted that Priscilla was not restricted to teaching in the children's wing, but rather she was involved in teaching “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). Indeed, Priscilla's teaching ministry cannot be denied. And while we must acknowledge that this text is descriptive rather than prescriptive, we also should observe that we have no hint of disapproval from Paul, who was quite familiar with this church planting pair.

Priscilla is but one example, but if 1 Cor 11:5 is any indication, women were consistently involved

---

<sup>41</sup> Other believers in Ephesus had also received only the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-7). The difference, it appears, is a matter of the Spirit. The baptism of John was a baptism of repentance – a turning away from sin. The baptism of Jesus, though, was an identification with him and a filling of the Holy Spirit – you could say, a turning toward Christ.

<sup>42</sup> Along these lines, Walter Liefeld wonders “... how does one explain something without teaching? ‘The way of God’ was a recognizable phrase for God's truth and the gospel in those early days when the New Testament Scriptures were not yet completed.” Walter L. Liefeld, “The Nature of Authority in the New Testament,” in *DBE* (eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 265.

<sup>43</sup> The only references where Priscilla is not mentioned first are Acts 18:2, where they are mentioned in the order that Paul met them, and 1 Cor 16:19.

<sup>44</sup> Linda L. Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” in *DBE* (eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 122.

<sup>45</sup> In fact, we have evidence of a late variant manuscript that puts Aquila's name first, probably as an attempt to repress the prominence of Priscilla in a Patriarchal society.



in prophetic/instructive/pastoral preaching roles. Miriam (Exod 15:20) and Huldah (2Kings 22:14-20) were both said to be prophetesses, as were Philip's four daughters in Acts 21:9. One commentator aptly summarizes:

*How can women like Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3), Prisca (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19), Mary (Rom. 16:6), Junia (Rom. 16:7), and Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rom. 16:12) function as co-workers in the churches if they cannot speak in those churches? How can Phoebe fulfill her role of deacon (Rom. 16:1-2) if she cannot speak out in the assembly? How can a woman like Nympha, who is influential enough to host a house church (Col. 4:15), have been required to remain silent in her own home (cf. also Prisca, the wife of Aquila, [1 Cor.] 16:19)?<sup>46</sup>*

## TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH? RETURNING TO 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15

Clearly at the time of his first letter to the Corinthians (roughly A.D. 55), Paul was not opposed to female participation in the corporate worship gathering. While women in the first century were generally restricted from speaking in public gatherings (*ekklēsia*), they were encouraged to use their gifts (even their prophetic gifts of “pastoral preaching” and teaching) for the benefit of the Christian gathering (*ekklēsia*). But why, then, does Paul command women not to teach (*didaskō*) when he writes his first letter to Timothy (probably in the mid-60's A.D.)?

It is helpful here to refer back to the division Paul seems to be making in 1 Cor 14.<sup>47</sup> Paul permits women to pray and prophesy in the congregation (11:5), the latter of which clearly included an element of teaching (1 Cor 14:19, 31; 14:6 also seems to link prophecy with teaching, and uses the same word as in 1 Tim 2:12 [*didaskō*]). Thus, the kind of teaching Paul is forbidding in 1 Tim 2:12 *must* be different than the kind of “pastoral preaching” and instruction performed by the prophets. In 1 Cor 14, the division Paul makes is not between teaching and silence, but rather between teaching/instruction/pastoral preaching (“prophecy,” which women were to participate in [1 Cor 11:5]) and determining what is sound doctrine (“weigh[ing] carefully what is said” [1 Cor 14:29], during which women were to remain “silent” [1 Cor 14:34]). Likewise, it can be concluded that the kind of teaching Paul is restricting in 1 Tim 2:12 was not general instruction, but the weighing and establishing of sound doctrine. As Craig Blomberg notes, this understanding adequately explains why Paul links teaching with authority in 1 Tim 2:12, which we will look at further below.<sup>48</sup>

## SUMMARY: FREEDOM FOR WOMEN TO TEACH

From what we have seen above, it seems that women can indeed participate in the teaching

---

<sup>46</sup> J.M. Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (eds. C.A. Newson and S.H. Ringe; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1992), 411-19; as cited by Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 665.

<sup>47</sup> Again, I refer you to Marshall's work, which compares the verbal parallels between 1 Tim 2:11-15 and 1 Cor 14:33b-35. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 439. See note 13 above for a more detailed analysis.

<sup>48</sup> Craig Blomberg notes that “this [understanding of Biblical Prophecy in 1 Cor. 14]...stands a good chance of explaining the combination of verbs ('teach' and 'exercise authority') in 1 Timothy 2:12.” Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 286.



ministry of the church, even in the presence of men. Not only are they permitted to do so, but those with the gift of teaching have an obligation to benefit the body of Christ by teaching/explaining/preaching in the local assemblies. However, Paul does seem to offer one restriction, namely that the responsibility of weighing and evaluating the doctrinal teaching in the church is to rest on the men.

With this understanding in mind, Grace Gathering affirms the gifts and abilities of women who teach and preach the Word of God. Just as Paul was not opposed to women “prophesying” in a mixed gender congregation, so we encourage women to use their teaching gifts in both gender specific and mixed gender audiences. This includes expositing Scripture from the pulpit on Sunday morning, teaching doctrinal truth in mixed gender classroom settings, preparing Biblical curriculum for use in mixed gender gatherings, etc. However, what is reserved for men is not Biblical study or exegesis, but the evaluation of such exegesis and its acceptance as the normative doctrinal position of our church. This responsibility falls on the shoulders of our group of Elders at Grace Gathering which is to be composed of qualified men.

It should be said at this point that Paul is not suggesting that women have no say in the evaluation of doctrine – after all, they are directed to do so using appropriate means (consult their husbands, 1 Cor 14:35) – but rather that such participation within the public sphere of the Christian *ekklēsia* would be inappropriate in some way (Paul even says, “disgraceful” in 1 Cor 14:35). In what way is this inappropriate? We will discuss this question at length below. At this point, though, we must consider the other restriction Paul gives in his letter to Timothy.

## “I Do Not Permit a Woman to... Hold Authority Over a Man.” (1 Timothy 2:12b)

In between Paul’s two-fold instruction for women to learn in peacefulness (1 Tim 2:11&12), he restricts them from participating in the establishment of sound doctrine (“teaching”) and from “exercising authority” (1 Tim 2:12b, NASB). It should be noted at this point that the word used here by Paul (*authenteō*) is not the typical word used for authority (*exousiazō*). What does Paul mean when he uses this unusual word?

Again, as you can imagine, the meaning of this word has sparked great debate. To make this matter more difficult, 1 Tim 2:12 is the only occurrence of the word *authenteō* in all of Scripture, and the few extrabiblical references we have are too varied in their usage to conclude anything dogmatically.<sup>49</sup> However, a few things can be said to guide our study. First, while the examination of extrabiblical uses of *authenteō* can be helpful, our study should be restricted to those uses that are verbs (as is the case in 1 Tim 2:12) and those that are closest to the time and setting in which Paul was writing (Asia Minor, during the mid-60s A.D.).<sup>50</sup> When this filter is put on our study, the

---

<sup>49</sup> Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 456.

<sup>50</sup> Moo, “What Does it Mean” [RBMW], 186.



consensus suggests the meaning “to exercise authority” or “to have dominion over.” While other occurrences of this word are used with the sense of forceful domination, they do not seem to be contemporary with Paul’s writing.<sup>51</sup> This does not mean Paul *could not* have used the word in this way, but rather that he probably did not use it this way.<sup>52</sup>

In addition, we should not conclude that Paul’s use of *authentēō* instead of *exousiazō* demands that he had a different meaning in mind. We saw above that the use of synonyms was not uncommon in Greek literature. In fact, Paul only used the verbal concept of exercising authority on five different occasions, in which he uses three different words for it!<sup>53</sup> While *exousia* is certainly the most common noun form, Paul establishes no consistent pattern in his use of verbs. Paul seems to be telling the young pastor Timothy that there is a level of leadership (“authority;” *authentēō*) within the church which is reserved for males, much like there is a form of teaching that is likewise designated for males.

## CORINTHIANS CAPS: FASHION FAUX PA OR SYMBOLIC STATEMENT? (1 COR 11:2-16)

In exploring this matter of authority, many are quick to refer back to Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Church, and perhaps rightfully so. As we saw above, Corinth was facing some daunting problems prompted by what has been called an “over realized eschatology.”<sup>54</sup> This had led the Corinthians to assume that Christ had already established his kingdom, and therefore the structures of this world were to be laid aside. This is why, in 1 Cor 7, Paul has to remind the Corinthians that their marital vows are still binding. Paul then turns his attention toward abused church practices and structures, which is the context for yet another pivotal text in this debate (1 Cor 11:2-16).<sup>55</sup>

*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.*

*Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her*

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> This is what is referred to as a “semantic anachronism” (see D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996], 33). This would be like a 21st century American using the word “gay” to mean “happy.” It’s possible, but it isn’t the most natural usage at the time.

<sup>53</sup> Paul uses the verbal concept of “exercising authority” in Rom. 7:1 (“has authority”), 1 Cor 6:12 (“be mastered”), 1 Cor 7:4 (used twice in this verse, “have authority,” NASB) and here in 1 Tim 2:12 (“have authority”). In these 5 examples of authority, 3 different words are used. Thus, we must not stake too much on what Paul’s “preferred” word for authority was. Cf. Moo, “What Does it Mean” [RBMW], 186.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” in RBMW (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 486 (n. 19).

<sup>55</sup> For more on the Corinthian situation, refer back to “The Corinthian Church” above.

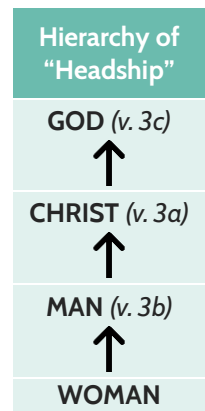


*head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 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. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.*

Paul begins this section of his letter much like he has the previous section. Paul begins with a word of affirmation for the Corinthian church, but they have once again gone too far.<sup>56</sup> Having just charged the Corinthian congregation that “nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor 10:24), Paul encourages them to follow his example and praises them for the matters which they are excelling in. But there is something they must realize – which implies that they were rather “ignorant” (12:1) on this matter and deserved “no praise” (11:17) from Paul – namely that there is a certain protocol that must be followed when the body of believers assembles for worship.

It is at this point that Paul introduces a principle that informs the verses that follow (11:3). His principle concerns a hierarchy of headship (see Figure 2). Much ink has been spilled over the nature and meaning of “head” (from the Greek word *kephalē*). While countless nuanced definitions have been proposed, two main definitions stand as the most plausible. The traditional understanding of *kephalē* is that it refers to an authoritative position over another (or a position of responsibility over another, as in Eph 1:22; 5:22-24; Col 2:10; cf. Col 2:15). More recently, others have suggested that a better understanding of *kephalē* is that it refers not to one’s authoritative “head,” but rather one’s origin or source (like the “head” of a river; see Col 1:18; 2:19; Eph 4:15).<sup>57</sup>



But the question is not about the possible meaning of *kephalē* – and indeed

FIGURE 2

<sup>56</sup> Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* [NIVAC], 208. This is referred to as Paul’s “yes, but” structure: yes, they got some parts right, but they have also gotten some matters quite wrong.

<sup>57</sup> Recently, a new option has emerged which tries to shed some of the hierarchical baggage of the traditional translation of “authority.” Rather than this hierarchical concept, they suggest “preeminence” or “priority” is the primary idea (cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 516; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 816-20). It seems, though, that this interpretation is merely a semantic attempt to remove the notion of male superiority over women (a notion which has resulted from the abuse of authority, not authority itself). While this is a noble pursuit, it seems that this can be corrected without abandoning the traditional understanding of



they have both been demonstrated as valid translations for this word – but rather which of the possible meanings best fits the context here.<sup>58</sup> In defense of what is often called the Source Theory, Paul does seem to use an argument of origin in 1 Cor 11:8 (“...man did not come from woman, but woman from man”).<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the proponents of the Source Theory are right in that *kephalē* can be translated “source” and, in a number of extrabiblical examples, should be translated so.<sup>60</sup> However, even in the examples cited above, we have no Biblical example of *kephalē* that demands “source” as its intended meaning. On the other hand, we have a number of texts where *kephalē* must indicate an authoritative hierarchy of responsibility rather than source, one of which seems to be this very verse (11:3).<sup>61</sup>

However, even if we grant *for the sake of the argument* that “source” is a more compelling translation here, this does not change the fact that the context bears authoritative overtones – a fact that most early Source Theory proponents openly affirmed.<sup>62</sup> In fact, in one of the most commonly cited articles in support of the Source Theory, Stephen Bedale concludes his findings by stating that “the male is the [*kephalē*, head] in the sense of [*archē*, beginning] relative to the female; and, in St. Paul’s view, the female in consequence is ‘subordinate’ [cf. Eph v.23]” (italics added for emphasis).<sup>63</sup> Thus, even if “source” were a more accurate translation, it does not absolve the egalitarian from dealing with the issue of authority structures.

Yet, at the risk of being reductionistic, there is still strong evidence in favor of understanding *kephalē* as an “authoritative head.” If Paul means to say merely that man is the source or origin of woman (11:3b, 8; i.e. woman was created out of the side of man; cf. Gen. 2:21-22), and therefore that Christ is the source of man (11:3a; i.e. man was created by Christ; Col 1:16), then we must also

---

“authority.” In this paper, we do not understand “authority” with rulership connotations, but rather indicating an order or responsibility.

<sup>58</sup> Much work has been done on both sides of the issue to demonstrate that *kephalē* can legitimately be translated as “source” (for a summary, see Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT], 502-505) or, on the other side, “authority” (Wayne Grudem, “Does *Kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Survey of 2,336 Examples,” *TrinJ* 6 (1985): 38-59). However, as a word of caution, it must also be noted that some of the publications on both sides of the issue have forsaken good scholarship for the sake of “winning the day.” Catherine Kroeger, in her contribution to the Dictionary of Paul and his Letters (“Head,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, [eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1993], pp. 375-377), argued in favor of the “source” translation by citing a quote from the Church Father John Chrysostom – a quote that was undeniably abused by Kroeger (cf. Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē*, (“Head ”): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged.” *JETS*, March 2001). On the other side of the issue, Wayne Grudem has claimed that the meaning “source” does not exist anywhere as a valid translation of *kephalē*, clearly an overstatement of the facts (see n. 16 below; cf. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT], p. 502-503, n. 42; Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* [NIVAC], 208-09.). Both extremes ought to be avoided.

<sup>59</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT], 503.

<sup>60</sup> Pride of place here goes to Orphic fragment (cited in LSJ): “Zeus is the *Kephalē*, Zeus is the middle, and from Zeus all things are completed.”

<sup>61</sup> Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity” [*RBMW*], 127; cf. Wayne Grudem, “Does *Kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature?” Another text that must be understood in terms of authority rather than source is Eph 5:22ff. – certainly it cannot be said that the husband is the source of the wife!

<sup>62</sup> Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* [NIVAC], 209.

<sup>63</sup> Stephen Bedale, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* in the Pauline Epistles,” *JTS* n.s.5 [1984]: 214, as cited in Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* [NIVAC], 209.





be prepared to say that God is the source or origin of Christ (11:3c)! It is precisely this theological claim which precipitated one of the most famous heresies of the early church (Arianism) and was condemned at the Council of Nicea (325 B.C.)!<sup>64</sup> If Christ had any source whatsoever (even God the Father himself), how could he be the eternal God of Scripture (Jn 1:1, 8:58; Mic 5:2)?

Rather, if *kephalē* is to be understood as “authority,” the assertion being made is that God the Father has an authoritative position over Christ the Son – a point that also leads some to ask whether this Christ is less-than-divine. Since God the Father and Christ the Son are both equally divine, how can one be said to be the authoritative head over the other? But the submission of the Son to the authority of the Father is a point of repeated emphasis in Scripture (Luke 22:42; John 6:38, 57; 8:28; 1 Cor 3:21-23),<sup>65</sup> perhaps the clearest example of which comes at the end of this very letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:27-28):

*For he “has put everything under his feet.” Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear **that this does not include God himself**, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then **the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him**, so that God may be all in all. (Bold added for emphasis.)*

For these reasons, it seems clear that Paul’s metaphorical use of “head” could not be referring merely to man as the source of woman, but rather to man as one who bears a position of authoritative responsibility.<sup>66</sup> We do not mean to imply that men exercise some form of rulership over women, but rather that God has established a form of hierarchy that places men in a position of responsibility over women. It is in this context of authority that Paul applies this principle to a specific situation in the church, namely the practice of praying and prophesying. He does so by using a pun on the word *kephalē*, used 5 times in these verses (11:4-5, bracketed words added to uncover the pun):<sup>67</sup>

Every man who prays or prophesies with his [physical] head covered dishonors his [authoritative] head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her [physical] head uncovered dishonors her [authoritative] head—it is just as though her [physical] head were shaved.

It is not insignificant that Paul does not prohibit women from praying and prophesying within the

---

<sup>64</sup> Arianism claimed that Christ was physically created by God, also referred to as the “eternal generation of the Son.” Fee suggests that his position is not in favor of the “eternal generation of the Son,” but rather refers to the incarnation (Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT], 505). But nothing in the context indicates any notion of Jesus coming to earth in bodily form. Rather, the context favors physical, bodily creation (Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* [NIVAC], 209). This is precisely the nature of the Arian heresy, which claimed that God the Father physically created the Son.

<sup>65</sup> Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity” [*RBMW*], 128.

<sup>66</sup> In this overview, we have hardly scratched the surface on the scholarship available on this issue. However, we have sought to engage with the most prominent writings and arguments for each position. At this point, I am inclined to think that the author of Ecclesiastes had this very issue in mind when he wrote “Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body.” (Eccl 12:12)

<sup>67</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 820.



church – in fact, he assumes it to be commonplace!<sup>68</sup> Rather, he forbids women from praying and prophesying in a culturally inappropriate fashion – namely, without their heads covered. Furthermore, the reason their head must be covered is not because of personal disgrace, but because it in some way disgraces (or “brings shame on,” *kataiskynō*) the one in authority over her (11:5). Likewise, a man is not to pray or prophesy with a covering on his head, as that would in some way bring disgrace on the one in authority over him (Christ; 11:4). In other words, in order for one to pray or prophesy (or, we can probably conclude, to participate in any public ministry of the church), it must be done in a manner that does not bring disgrace to the one in higher authoritative responsibility.

It is best to admit upfront that there is a great deal of uncertainty as to what kind of head coverings Paul has in mind here. Are they prayer shawls? Is Paul talking about hair piled up on a woman’s head? Does the form of the head covering even matter? And most significantly, who was expected to wear these head coverings – all women or married women? Unfortunately, the water gets quite muddy at this point and thus our conclusions must be cautious. We have little evidence of this practice from the first century, and what we do have seems inconclusive and even contradictory at times.<sup>69</sup> While Paul certainly refers to long hair (11:6, 14-15), it seems that Paul is talking primarily about a covering worn on the head, and long hair is used as an illustration to support his point – namely, that just as it was culturally unfitting for a woman to resemble a male in her hairstyle, so it was unfitting for a woman to pray and prophecy without a head covering as a man would.<sup>70</sup> While we cannot say with certainty what this head covering looked like, we can conclude with confidence that whatever the form of the head covering, it was intended to demonstrate something about femininity as opposed to masculinity.

That being said, a rather compelling case can be made that Paul is not addressing women’s involvement in the authority of the church, but wives’ private and public submission to their husbands as a prerequisite for participation in public prayer and prophecy.<sup>71</sup> This would fit quite nicely with Paul’s rather lengthy discourse on marriage, where he challenges the Corinthians to stop denigrating their marital vows, but rather to fulfill them (1 Cor 7). In this view, Paul would be restricting those who were not honoring their respective roles in marriage from participation in

---

<sup>68</sup> Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity” [*RBMW*], 132.

<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, the “head coverings” appear to mean different things for men and women. In terms of the forbidden male head-covering, some have suggested that wearing such an item (or having long hair) was to suggest male femininity and perhaps even homosexuality (J. Murphy-O’Conner; cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 824; Schreiner, “Head Coverings” [*RBMW*], 130). Others claim this prohibition to be related to the practice of Romans “wearing [their] toga over the head at pagan sacrifices.” Thus, “pulling the toga over the physical head in Christian worship would shame the spiritual head of the man, Christ” (Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 517; Fee contradicts this claim entirely, asserting that “there is almost no evidence...that men in any of the cultures [Greek, Roman, Jew] covered their heads.” Cf. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT], 507). The theories also abound for women who refused to wear their head covering. Some suggest it as a sign of prostitution or availability (Thiselton refers to this as self-advertisement; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 829). Others suggest it is an overreaction to Christian freedom and an attempt to shed gender distinctions (Gundry-Volf, Hays, Collons; cf. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 829).

<sup>70</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 518.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* [NIVAC], 209, who suggests that “in every other place where [“man” (*aner*) and “woman” (*gune*)] are paired, with the possible exception of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, they refer to husband and wife.”





public worship. However, if this is what Paul has in mind, and if the head covering is intended to show proper submission to their husbands, then why aren't wives asked to wear a head covering in any of their other church functions? Why single out their prophetic and intercessory roles? What is it about these practices that require a covering over their heads?

In order to gain a further understanding of why Paul singles out prophetic and prayer ministries, we would benefit from remembering Paul's underlying point on 1 Cor 14. Previously, we saw that women were to remain silent, not in the church service broadly, but rather in the authoritative weighing of prophetic utterances (1 Cor 14:33b-35). Paul does not forbid women from participating in prophetic ministries, but rather in the evaluation of what has been said. Thus, prophetic utterances depend on (or come under the authority of) the authoritative evaluation of the church – a role reserved for males.

With this understanding in mind, we gain some clarity into the concept of a head covering. Paul specifically mentions the need for a head covering, not because a head covering has universal significance, but because the head covering communicated something to a specific culture about gender distinction. Paul highlighted the need to wear such head coverings during female participation in prophetic and prayer ministries because such a context called for gender distinction in the church. Since both prayer and prophecy involve making theological assertions that must be weighed and evaluated for accuracy (a role reserved for men), a head covering was worn to demonstrate that the woman's prayer and prophecy are under the authoritative weighing of her "head" – male church leaders.

### **EXAMPLE: FEMALE AUTHORITY**

As we have already discovered, both 1 Cor 11:2-16 and 14:33b-35 seem to restrict women, not from teaching or prophesying or praying, but rather from the authoritative role of determining what is sound doctrine. However, is this the only restriction on women serving in positions of authority? Can a woman serve on a committee? If so, can she serve as the Chairperson of the committee? Can she serve as a Deacon or an Elder? Can she serve as a Pastor? Where is one to draw the proverbial line?

In order to answer this question, it is helpful to examine a few things from the broad spectrum of Scriptural evidence. First, as we saw with teaching, none of the spiritual gifts are given gender restrictions.<sup>72</sup> Just as teaching gifts and prophetic gifts should not be limited to males (1 Cor 12:28), neither should leadership or administrative gifts (Rom 12:8). Second, as we saw with Priscilla's teaching ministry, we must also consider the examples of women in Scripture who exercised authoritative leadership roles. The most obvious example is Deborah, who served as Judge and prophetess over Israel (Judg 4-5).

Furthermore, Paul seems to entrust women with rather prominent ministry positions. Priscilla

---

<sup>72</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 665.



(Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19) and Nympha (Col 4:15) both hosted house-churches in their homes. Mary (Rom. 16:6), Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Rom 16:12) are all said to work hard for the Lord. Syntyche and Euodia (Phil 4:2) also apparently shared some prominence in the Philippian Church, as Paul identifies them as loyal co-laborers – a title he often associated with such prominent males as Timothy (Rom 16:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Apollos (1 Cor 3:9), Epaphras and Luke (Philemon 24). It can also be suggested that Chloe was in some position of prominence, as she wrote Paul to inform him of the Corinthian waywardness (1 Cor 1:11).

One other specific example is worth extended consideration. In Romans 16:7, Paul refers to someone named Junias as being “outstanding among the apostles.” The implication is that Junias is one of the apostles who has risen to great prominence. But there is significant evidence that suggests that the name “Junias” is better translated “Junia” – a feminine name! In fact, we have absolutely *no evidence* of a masculine name “Junias” existing from the first century, yet we have a number of inscriptions that bear the feminine name “Junia.”<sup>73</sup> Could there be a female apostle? If the Roman church is any indication, the answer is likely yes!

## DEACONS AND ELDERS IN EPHESUS

It is at this point that we return to Paul’s letter to young Timothy, for immediately after Paul’s restriction against women “exercising authority,” he begins discussing character qualifications for the highest authoritative positions in the church: Elders and Deacons.<sup>74</sup> While there are a significant number of similarities in the qualifications for both offices, there are a few significant differences that need to be highlighted. First, there are responsibilities expected of Elders that are not part of the description of Deacons. For instance, Elders are to be able to teach (*didaktikos*; 1 Tim 3:2), while deacons seem to have no necessary teaching responsibilities. That is not to say that deacons cannot teach (Stephen [Acts 6:8–8:1] and Philip [Acts 8:4–8, 26–40] were both skilled teachers; cf. Acts 6:5). Rather, proficiency in teaching is not a *requirement* for serving as a deacon. Elders were also expected to participate in the managing (*epimeleomai*) of the church (1 Tim 3:5), while deacons were to be more preoccupied by the physical needs of the congregation.<sup>75</sup>

The second major difference between Elders and Deacons is that, while both Elders and Deacons must be “the husband of but one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12), only the Deacons have specific instructions concerning their “wives” (1 Tim 3:11). However, the word translated in the NIV as “wives” can also be translated “women” (*gunē*; cf. NASB). The difference is substantial, for if it is meant to be translated “women,” then it is not referring to the wives of Deacons, but *female Deacons*. If

---

<sup>73</sup> Linda L. Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” [DBE], 117.

<sup>74</sup> Marshall notes the significance of this. In a church where false teaching and heresy pervade, which apparently has resulted in some individuals teaching and holding authority who should not (including women), Paul now turns his attention toward who should fill these highest offices of the church. Cf. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 473.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching,” in *RBMW* [eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006], 220.



“wives” is to be the preferred translation, we must ask why Paul has expectations for Deacon’s wives, but mentions nothing in regard to the wives of Elders – presumably, the higher position!<sup>76</sup> It seems more likely that, since ultimate authority did not rest on the Deacons, women were permitted to serve in this capacity.<sup>77</sup>

This understanding is supported by Romans 16:1-2, where Phoebe is called a *deaconos* (“a Deacon”) of the church in Cenchrea. Among other modern translations, the NIV and NASB translate this word “servant” instead of “Deacon.” While that is certainly a valid meaning of the word, it also had come to be associated with an established position of service within the church.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, if Paul were merely referring to Phoebe’s service, he would have employed a feminine noun to describe her (as with Martha in Lk 10:40 who was described as a *deaconia*). Instead, Paul uses the masculine/neuter noun (*deaconon*), which would be perfectly acceptable –and expected – if used as a formal position in the church.<sup>79</sup> In all probability, due to Paul’s high praise of Phoebe and her close association with the church in Cenchrea, it seems most natural to read *deaconos* here as the position of “Deaconess” (a female Deacon).<sup>80</sup>

## ELDERS / OVERSEERS / PASTORS: WHAT DO THEY DO?

In order to understand the role of the Elder, first some additional terms need to be considered. When Paul wrote his letter to Titus, he began by instructing him in the ordaining of “Elders” (*presbyteros*; Titus 1:5). But midway through his discourse, he switches titles to “Overseer” (*episkopos*; Titus 1:7). Likewise, when Paul was addressing the Elders (*presbyteros*; Acts 20:17) of Ephesus, he charges them to “keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopos*)” (Acts 20:28). He also goes on to tell them to “be shepherds (*poimainō*) of the church of God” – a word from which we get our title “Pastor.” Peter makes the same equation, using the titles “Elder,” “Shepherd/Pastor” and “Overseer” interchangeably while addressing the same group of people (1Pet 5:1-2; same Greek words as above). Thus, it seems that the Bible uses the titles “Elder,” “Shepherd/Pastor,” and “Overseer” interchangeably.<sup>81</sup>

Some, particularly from the Presbyterian persuasion, have understood from this that under the

---

<sup>76</sup> Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 488.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 493-94. Among his arguments for translating *gunē* as “women [deaconesses], the following are most convincing: (1) “If ‘wives’ were meant, it would be normal to indicate this with a possessive pronoun” [i.e. their wives]; (2) “Why should the wives of deacons, as opposed to overseers, need special qualifications?” (3) Phoebe is referred to as a female deacon (*deaconos*) in Rom 16:1.

<sup>78</sup> In Acts 6, the position of Deacon was instituted so they might serve those who had physical needs (Acts 6:1-6). However, we also find this group ministering to some spiritual needs, particularly Stephen (6:8-7:60) and Philip (8:1-40).

<sup>79</sup> Belleville notes that Phoebe was the carrier of Paul’s letter to the Romans – a position of prominence. This explains why Paul begins Rom. 16 by listing her credentials. Furthermore, church history attests Phoebe as a deacon (cf. Origen, *Homilies on Romans* 10.17; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, 31) See Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible” [DBE], 121.

<sup>80</sup> Even conservative Complementarians can concede this point. Cf. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Critical Concerns,” in *RBMW* (eds. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 69; Schreiner, “The Valuable Ministries” [RBMW], 220.

<sup>81</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth Publishers), 32.



broad category of “Elder” (*presbyteros*), there are governing Elders (*episkopos*, “overseers”) and teaching Elders (*poimainō*, “shepherds/ pastors”). This position is further defended by appealing to 1 Tim 5:17, which says, “the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” However, this seems a bit reductionistic, for all Elders must be able to teach (*didaktikos*; 1 Tim 3:2) and to govern (*proistēmi*; 1 Tim 3:4-5). While some Elders may do more teaching than others, we shouldn’t conclude that some Elders teach and others govern. Elders are to be chosen for their ability in both areas.

In the New Testament church, it appears as though the office of Elder/Overseer/Pastor was the highest “office” of the church.<sup>82</sup> They were charged with protecting and caring for the flock of God (Acts 20:28), warding off false teachers (Acts 20:29), directing the affairs of the church (1 Tim. 5:17), and setting a positive example (1Pet 5:3). In the early church, it was the Elders and Apostles who moderated the Jerusalem Council and ultimately decided the sound course of action (Acts 15:2, 4, 22-23). It is the Elders who ultimately bless and commission the work of the gospel (1 Tim 4:14). It is the Elders who serve as the conduit for healing (James 5:14). And ultimately, it is this group of people whom “the Chief Shepherd” would hold accountable for the condition of his bride, the church (1Pet 5:4), which is why Paul made certain that the appointing of Elders was a priority in each church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Ultimately, they are the spiritual caretakers of the body of Christ.

## ELDERS / OVERSEERS / PASTORS: WHO ARE THEY TODAY?

But the question we must ask as we seek to apply this to our modern context is whether our modern position of “Pastor” correlates with the position of Elder/Overseer/Pastor in the New Testament. In answering this question, it is important to distinguish between title and position. We ought to resist blanket statements that refer merely to titles, such as “women cannot be Pastors” or “women cannot be Elders.” The issue is not the title used, but the level of authority and doctrinal oversight each position exercises.<sup>83</sup> The New Testament position seems to refer to the highest level of spiritual authority within the church. For some churches, this highest level of authority lies in the position of Pastor, in which case it seems best to reserve this position for male leadership. Other churches are more led by a board of Elders (which may or may not include members of the Pastoral staff). Still other churches claim the highest authority resides with the congregation.<sup>84</sup> The question we must ask is, in each of these specific models of church governance, what contemporary office is closest to the authority described by the New

---

<sup>82</sup> Some have argued that, in the early church, such “offices” were not officially established. Based on such passages as Acts 6, 15, 20; 1 Timothy 3, 5; Titus 1; etc., it cannot be denied that the offices of Elder and Deacon existed (albeit perhaps in a seedling form). Additionally, Paul clearly places special emphasis on the position of Elder, appointing elders in every church (Acts 14:23) and encouraging others to do the same (Titus 1:5). No such priority is placed on the office of Deacon. Cf. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 488.

<sup>83</sup> If the title “Pastor” or “Elder” refers to anything other than the highest strata of spiritual leadership in the church, then it can be argued that women *should* be permitted to hold these offices. The issue is not the title used, but the duties performed.

<sup>84</sup> All of these positions on church governance are “Biblical,” in that they all find their support in the Scriptures. This paper is not intended to decide which of these is preferable, but rather to suggest that each model of governance will have a different application on the matter of female involvement.



Testament?

At Grace Gathering, the highest spiritual authority resides in with our Elders. This group of individuals works together in making certain strategic decisions, overseeing all finances, is responsible for shepherding, and protecting the doctrinal position of the church. Therefore, the position as Elder is reserved for males, while all other Pastoral positions are left open to both male and female participation.

### **SUMMARY: FREEDOM FOR WOMEN TO LEAD**

In summary, it appears that Paul (in agreement with the rest of the Biblical witness) is not opposed to women participating in authoritative positions within the local church. If entrusted with the spiritual gift of leadership or administration, women actually have an obligation to steward that gift by using it for the benefit of the church! Again, this was tremendously liberating for women in a first-century setting where women were usually repressed from involvement in public assemblies. Women are free, therefore, to serve in any authoritative position of the church with but one apparent exception: the evidence from Scripture seems to indicate that the highest level of authority is to reside with male leadership. This highest level of governmental authorities again resides with our Elders. Unfortunately, too much emphasis has been placed on this restriction, when in reality women are empowered to serve within the church of Jesus Christ.

## **Culturally Specific or Universal Truth? Paul On Adam And Eve**

As mentioned above, Paul's understanding of the role of women in the church was incredibly liberating for the first century world. But the fact is that our culture is much different than the first century in this respect. Women have made great strides in the pursuit of gender equality, and rightfully so. Looking back across the corridors of human history, male domination and female subjection is a travesty that ought to be overturned! As outlined at the beginning of this study, both Complementarians and Egalitarians affirm that both genders are of equal ontological value, and it is good and proper for the Church to embrace and pursue this equality.

Yet, all of this prompts some significant questions. Why does Paul implement these restrictions based solely on gender? Should we understand these principles outlined above as universal truths or as culturally relative and subject to change (or elimination)? Our answers are found in a significant similarity shared by all three of the passages studied above. Interestingly, Paul grounds each passage in a significant Old Testament text: Genesis 2.

### **1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15**

As we have seen, in the midst of prevalent false teaching in the church, Paul instructed Timothy on the appropriate behavior of men and women in the church gathering. After instructing both men and women to live peacefully with others (2:2, 8, 11, 12), Paul then passed along a principle to the young pastor: women are not to "teach" or to "exercise authority" over a man. From our



study above, we have concluded that Paul does not forbid teaching, per se, nor even teaching men, but rather Paul forbids women from exercising doctrinal oversight. Likewise, Paul does not forbid female governance, but rather participation in the highest level of governing authority within the church. Instead of exercising doctrinal oversight and top-tier governance, women were to promote peacefulness within the church (2:12b) by exercising their Spiritual gifts in an appropriate manner.

Immediately after this prohibition, Paul offers his readers an explanation of his rationale:<sup>85</sup>

*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. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

Paul here highlights two significant events in the history of mankind: Creation (v. 13) and the Fall (v. 14). Paul starts first with Creation (1 Tim 2:13), reminding Timothy (and the Ephesians) that man was created before the woman. Paul's point is not merely chronological. Rather, the more significant point is functional.<sup>86</sup> If God had created the woman after the man, but intended her to function entirely on her own, Paul's point here would be moot. So what if one was created before another? Rather, what Paul is referring to is that, in the Creation account, man was created first and woman was created afterwards *in order to be a helper perfectly suited for him (ezer; Gen. 2:18, 20b)*.<sup>87</sup> God created them at different times and in different ways in order to indicate that, while extraordinarily similar (and both imagers of God), they also bear important differences that complement each other. In the very purpose of Creation, God created the woman to have a specific helping role. Therefore, it seems Paul's point in citing the Creation account is to suggest that this same complementarity that existed in Creation is to be fostered in the local Church. When females participate in the exercising of doctrinal oversight and governmental authority, this complementary relationship is in some way disrupted.

Second, Paul turns his attention toward the Fall in Genesis 3 (1 Tim 2:14). Unfortunately, Paul's words here have often been dismissed, abused, or ignored entirely. Paul's point about the Fall is not to say that women are more prone to deception than men.<sup>88</sup> They are not intellectually or morally inferior *in any way*. Otherwise, why only prohibit them from teaching *men*? If women were truly the ones most easily deceived, then it seems natural to restrict them from all teaching

---

<sup>85</sup> That verse 13 indicates an explanation of rationale is indicated by the explanatory conjunction "for" (*gar*). Cf. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 142; Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 460.

<sup>86</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* [NIGTC], 143.

<sup>87</sup> As mentioned previously, this does not suggest that the woman is ontologically inferior to the man, as both are created in God's image and both share in the cultural mandate. The difference is not ontological, but functional. It is also worth noting that function does not determine value. The word used to describe the woman as a "helper" is the same word used of God in his relationship with Israel (Ex. 18:4; Dt. 33:29; Ps. 30:10; 33:20; Isa. 41:10). Certainly, we are not suggesting that God is inferior to Israel, but rather that God does for Israel what they cannot do without him! Ortlund states rightly that "the fallacy lies in the implication... that God cannot be subordinate to human beings. It is entirely possible for God to subordinate Himself, in a certain sense, to human beings. He does so whenever he undertakes to help us." Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship" [RBMW], 104.

<sup>88</sup> Moo, "What Does it Mean?" [RBMW], 190.





roles! A better understanding of this verse comes when we read it as a continuation of verse 13 (notice, the two verses are joined by the conjunction “and,” [kaī]). While the temptation account of Genesis 3 focuses primarily on the woman, the text makes it clear that the man, who was given the responsibility to care for her, was with her during the temptation (Gen 3:6). Apart from the obvious sin of eating the forbidden fruit, *both of them* failed to live in the complementary relationship God had established. It seems that Paul’s point is that Eve’s deception in the Garden was not only to eat the fruit, but to

*“[take] the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church at Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church, ...seeking roles that have been given to men in the church [1 Tim 2:12], they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church.”<sup>89</sup>*

It is tremendously significant that Paul does not refer merely to the Fall. A predominant position among Egalitarians is to understand the role distinction between men and women as a product (curse) of the fall (Gen 3:16) that is finally reversed through the redemptive work of Christ (Gal 3:28–29).<sup>90</sup>

However, Paul roots his argument here not primarily in the Fall, but in the relationship between man and woman as demonstrated through the order of their creation. These complementary roles are not the product of the Fall, though they are certainly disturbed and distorted through the Fall.<sup>91</sup> Role distinctions seem to be established at the very moment of Creation, when Eve, having been created from Adam’s side, is brought to Adam and he names her “woman, for she was taken out of man” (Gen 2:23). Just as Adam was given the authority to name the animals (Gen 2:18), so the man exercises the same authority in naming his new helper. Thus, it seems that, even before the Fall, God instituted a complementary order in creation. It is precisely this complementary ordering that Paul refers to as the basis for his restrictions on women in the church. Paul prohibits women from exercising the highest level of doctrinal and governmental oversight in the church because, in so doing, they would disrupt the created role of each gender.

Paul concludes with another hotly debated verse, suggesting that women are saved through childbirth (v. 15). Why on earth would Paul refer to childbirth in this context? While much is uncertain about this verse, it is helpful to read it in the context we have just studied. Paul seems

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Of course, this position is based on the assumption that gender-role distinction is not a part of God’s creation design, but rather was introduced as a result of the Fall in Gen. 3:16; Hess comments, “...such hierarchy is not presented as an ideal, but rather as a reality of human history like that of the weeds that spring from the earth. The resolution of this conflict in equality and harmony cannot be found in these chapters [Genesis 1–3] but looks forward to a future redemption.” Richard S. Hess, “Equality With and Without Innocence: Genesis 1–3” in DBE (eds. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005), 95.

<sup>91</sup> Complementarians believe it is this abuse of gender distinctions that Christ conquers in his work of redemption, not the roles themselves (Gal. 3:28). In much the same way, it is the *abuse* of ethnic or sociological differences that Paul condemns in this text, not the ethnicities themselves. “Christian redemption does not redefine creation; it restores creation, so that wives learn godly submission and husbands learn godly headship.” Ortlund, “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship” [RBMW], 109



to be indicating that Eve fell into sin when she disrupted her God-given role, as described above. Paul then contrasts this fall with her salvation (*sōzō*, usually indicating spiritual, not physical salvation), which comes through “childbirth.”

But why single out childbirth? Paul, speaking to a predominantly married context in Ephesus, referred to the one central role that obviously pertained to married women – childbirth. It seems Paul is using childbirth as an illustration of his point. Paul is not saying that women must bear children in order to be saved. Nor is Paul saying that God’s design is simply that women bear children, or that he is more pleased by those who bear children. Paul’s point is that certain tasks have been given to each gender which cannot and should not be performed by the other gender (for men, Paul gives the example of “teaching” and “exercising authority;” for women, his example is childbirth). Marshall observes that “the stress is not on the pain of childbirth but rather on the fulfillment of the role of mother.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, the issue is not bearing children, per se, but fulfilling our God-given gender roles.

Far too often, though, interpretation of this text stops short of the whole verse. Women are not saved merely by bearing children, nor even by “embracing their God-given roles” so to speak. Rather, they will be “saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” In other words, childbearing (or embracing our God-given roles) is not the means of salvation, but rather it partners with faith, love, and holiness as the evidence that one has indeed been saved. And all of these (including embracing our God-given roles) are to be tempered “with propriety” – better translated as “self-control” (*sōphrosunē*). Thus, embracing God’s design for the respective genders is not how one gets saved, but rather it is one of the evidences that one has indeed been saved. Whereas the Fall was related to the abuse of God’s complementary design, the evidence of salvation is the recapturing and reimplementing of this ideal design.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

Interestingly enough, when we look back at Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we find the same rational grounding for Paul’s position. In 1 Cor 11, Paul instructs the Corinthian women to conduct themselves in the local church in a way that demonstrates their respect for and submission to their authoritative head, namely the male leadership of the church. Likewise, men are not to lord this authority over the women or seek to inflate their own egos, but rather are to conduct themselves in a way that honors their authoritative head, Christ, to whom the church ultimately belongs.

At this point, Paul grounds his argument in the following manner:

*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*

---

<sup>92</sup> Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* [ICC], 470. Marshall continues: “The point is probably directed against a belief that women should abstain from childbirth, just as they should abstain from marriage. ...Though they may not teach, women will still be saved by fulfilling their Christian duty in motherhood.”





*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.*

While Paul's wording here is slightly different than in 1 Tim 2, it is rather clear that his point is the same. Paul again roots his position in Creation, stating even more clearly that the woman was created for man as a perfectly suited helper (v. 9). It is because of this initial purpose in the creation order that women should conduct themselves in a way that demonstrates this complementary relationship.<sup>93</sup>

Paul goes on to remind them that, due to their complementary roles established at creation, both men and women are dependent on each other (vv. 11-12). Yes, woman came from man, but now man comes from and, in a sense, is entirely dependent on woman (another child birth analogy; cf. 1 Tim 2:15)! Both genders are essential for human flourishing when they function in their God-given roles.<sup>94</sup>

### 1 CORINTHIANS 14:33b-36

When Paul once again addresses this issue in his letter to the Corinthians, no overt reference to Gen 2 can be found. However, Paul does ground his argument in what "the Law says" (1 Cor 14:34).

*As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, **as the Law says**. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (Bold added for emphasis.)*

What Law is Paul referring to? Some have suggested that the Law refers to the Mosaic Law, but we find no specific command in the Mosaic Law that forbids women from speaking in the public assembly.<sup>95</sup> Others interpret Paul as referring, not to a specific Law, but to Jewish tradition. However, of Paul's ninety plus uses of "law," we have no other example where Paul uses it in this manner.<sup>96</sup> In the only two other locations where Paul uses the phrase "as the law says" (Rom 3:19; 1 Cor 9:8), he refers either to the Mosaic Law or the Old Testament.

While we may be speculating at this point, it seems likely that Paul's defense here would be the

---

<sup>93</sup> As you might expect, there is much debate over what Paul means by his phrase "because of the angels" (v. 10). Due to the vast uncertainty on this point, we should use the more obvious context around it to help us understand the phrase in question (not vice-versa). Perhaps Paul is simply calling our attention to the angels, who set an example by submitting to their authoritative head, God the Father. As Thiselton aptly summarizes, "as in heaven, so on earth." Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 841. Thankfully, regardless of its meaning, the obscurity of this phrase does not alter the meaning of the text, but rather supports it.

<sup>94</sup> It is interesting again that Paul refers to childbirth, much as he did in 1 Timothy 2:15, and perhaps for the same reason – to stress an obviously female role to which most women in this context could relate. What I find most interesting is that, when Paul refers to the gender role of childbirth, it is an unchangeable, supracultural role. Perhaps Paul is making another, more subtle argument: If you really think these roles are interchangeable, why not give up childbirth?

<sup>95</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians* [BECNT], 673.

<sup>96</sup> Carson, "Silent in the Churches" [RBMW], 148.



same as that found in 1 Tim 2:13 and 1 Cor 11:8-9, namely the order of the creation account in Gen 1-2.<sup>97</sup> This is especially likely since Paul had made this same argument in 1 Cor 11, located just a few paragraphs earlier and within the same context of behavior within the church. Could it be that Paul, in simply referring to the Law, was actually referring to the same passage in Genesis 2 (part of the Torah) that he previously made reference to? This seems to be the most likely option.

## **SUMMARY: EMBRACING GOD'S DESIGN FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN THE LOCAL CHURCH**

Paul, then, grounds his argument for complementarity, not in passing cultural fads or trends, but rather in the original Creation design of God. When God created man and woman, they were created in a perfectly complementary relationship. This ideal relationship was marred in the Fall, resulting in gender abuse and marginalization. Rather than respecting and upholding ontological equality, one gender (usually women) has constantly had to fight against the cultural stigma of ontological inferiority. Yet in the redemptive work of Christ and the offer of salvation, we seek to restore the Creation design of God in all areas of life. The local church, as a redemptive community, should lead the way in embracing these functional differences in ways that do not negate the ontological equality of both genders.

---

<sup>97</sup> Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC], 1153; cf. F.F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* [NCBC; London: Oliphants, 1971], 136; Carson, "Silent in the Churches" [RBMW], 152.



# Conclusion

---

From our study of the major Biblical texts on this issue, we find the strongest case in favor of a Complementarian position. While we affirm the ontological and functional value of all people, we find a strong case in favor of functional complementarity within the local church setting. Specifically, Paul seems to reserve the highest level of doctrinal oversight and governmental authority for males, while allowing tremendous freedom for women to participate in any other functional ministry of the church. We hold these Biblical texts to be advocating universal, supracultural truths rooted in God's purpose in Creation.

For Grace Gathering, this highest level of doctrinal and governmental authority resides with our Elders. Apart from this team, we uphold opportunities for women to exercise their gifts through teaching and exercising authority in prominent leadership positions within the church. This includes use of all spiritual gifts, oversight of specific ministries, participation on our pastoral staff, and opportunities to preach and teach on a Sunday morning or any other public setting. While we respect those who support the position giving freedom for women within the position of elder, and we respect those who support a more restrictive position for women within the role of preaching and teaching, it seems from our study that our position is both Biblically responsible and God-honoring.

It is important to note that foundational doctrines within the church are positions that should require unity and agreement within the body. Things like the nature of God (his eternity, trinity, omni-presence, etc.), the nature of salvation (Jesus as the only way to the Father, death, burial, resurrection, salvation by faith, etc.), godly morality (sexual purity, honesty, racial equality, dignity of all life, etc. as moral absolutes), and the authority of God's word (original manuscripts without error, historical and grammatical approach to interpretation, etc.) are all among the areas that believers should defend against those who oppose.

However, there are a number of doctrinal positions of which biblical believers can disagree and yet can still function and partner together. How gender roles function together is one of those areas. There is a reason healthy, biblical churches have different views on this issue. There is a certain level of humility that must be maintained when the level of difficulty is high in the pursuit of maintaining hermeneutical consistency within a theological viewpoint outside of those foundational doctrines. Theology is not an exact science, and therefore, grace and love must permeate differences of opinion and conviction.

While the above position is the best attempt by the Grace Gathering elders to be true to the whole council of God and Scripture with the subject at hand, the elders are fallible men. The authority of God comes from his word. It is the interpretation of his word that is prone to human error. In this regard the issue is always "degrees" of certainty. Members at Grace are completely free to have personal positions that give more or less freedom for women in these roles, and the



elders welcome challenge as it desires the church to be Berean (Acts 17:11)

The only thing the elders expect is that within these discussions and debate love and grace permeate the dialogue. Church members are not called to always agree with their leader but they are called to follow and respect them (I Peter 5:5-7, Heb. 13:17).

The elders will continue to come back to Scripture and seek God in all aspects of doctrinal purity and encourage members within the congregation to do the same as we follow Jesus who is the head and ultimate authority of his church. To God be the glory!



# Bibliography

---

Bauer, Walter, Frederick William Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957. Third ed., 2000.

Blomberg, Craig. *1 Corinthians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Bruce, F.F. *1 and 2 Corinthians*. New Century Bible Commentary. London: Oliphants, 1971.

Carson, D.A. *Exegetical Fallacies*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.

Carson, D.A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999. Rev. ed. 2005

Fee, Gordon D. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary of the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.

Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid. *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Knight, George W., III. *The Pastoral Epistles*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.

Marshall, I. H. *The Pastoral Epistles*. *International Critical Commentary*. New York: T&T Clark, 1999; sec. ed. 2006.

Osborne, Grant. *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991.

Pierce, Ronald W., and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds. *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2005.

Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006.

Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*. Colorado Springs: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995. Rev. ed. 2005.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.