

WOMEN **in ministry**

A BIBLICAL STUDY



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Women continue to be marginalized in the Western world today, viewed as inferior to men. This continues to be the case, in much more dehumanizing ways, in most of the third world. In the church too, there remains varying attitudes to women and specifically, to their contributions in ministry and leadership. Volumes exist debating the issue. This article attempts to clarify our conviction on this subject and hopes to shatter the shackles that hold women from ministering freely and powerfully as the Lord calls them to do so.

Equality of worth and importance...

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion...’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion...’” (Genesis 1:26-28).

God created men and women equal in worth and importance. He did not create self-sufficient, unisexual beings; rather He created “[humanity*] **in His own image...male and female He created them**” (v. 27). From this creation account we immediately see that man in himself is incomplete and woman in herself is incomplete. ***Together men and women would reveal the fullness and glory of God.*** An often missed point in this revelation of God’s purpose for mankind is that He entrusted this dominion mandate to both man and woman: **“let them have dominion”**. It was not God’s original purpose for man to rule and for woman to be ruled. God intended men and women, filled with His Spirit, to rule over the created world together on His behalf. ***Together men and women would not only reveal the glory of God but were to jointly rule on behalf of Him!***

Distinct roles and responsibilities in the marriage covenant...

After creating both men and women in His image and entrusting joint rule to them, ***God then defined specific, different roles for them to play within the marriage covenant*** (Genesis 2:7-25). In brief, part of man’s God-given role was, and is, to carry the primary leadership role ***within the marital relationship***. While both men and women were to jointly rule over the created world, God designed distinct roles within the marriage covenant based on the created order. ***God created man first, entrusting primary leadership to him*** (Genesis 2:7-20). By pointing to this order in creation we are not suggesting God intended any structural hierarchy within marriage; only that the Bible reveals that God-created attributes emerged within both man and woman based on their creation order.

*The Hebrew word *adam* refers to humanity at large. It is used 20 times as “**Adam**” (the proper name), and more than 500 times in reference to humanity. In one case it actually refers exclusively to women (see Numbers 31:35). Genesis 1:27 clearly teaches that God made the species called “humanity” in His image, and stresses that this includes both “**male**” and “**female**”.

In being created first, man's first relationship was with the work God entrusted to him (Genesis 2:15-17); thus, ***“man” is essentially more functional and analytical by nature.*** In being created second, woman's first relationship was with a person (Genesis 2:21, 22); thus, ***“woman” is essentially more relational and intuitive by nature.*** Thus, in creating ***“man,”*** God made him to be more suitable in serving as the primary leadership figure in the ***marriage covenant,*** freeing ***“woman”*** to contribute her created strengths to the ***“one flesh”*** team of husband and wife (Genesis 2:24). Paul referred to this created order to make just this point (1 Timothy 2:13, 14). Certainly other reasons confirm this conclusion. For example, God allowed the man to name the woman, a Biblical act of headship (Genesis 2:23; 3:20) and directly after the fall, God required the man to give primary account for what had happened (Genesis 3:9-12). While some men are more relational in their orientation and some women are more functional in theirs, this does not change the essential roles God has designed in marriage.

It is worth stressing that the fall was not responsible for this distinction in role; yet the fall certainly distorted this distinction. When God revealed the consequences that their actions introduced into the world, He said to the woman: ***“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”*** (Genesis 3:16). The phrase, ***“your desire shall be for your husband”*** refers to a woman's fallen tendency to try to usurp her husband's authority; to conquer, to oppose him. The phrase ***“and he shall rule over you”*** refers to a man's fallen tendency to deal harshly with his wife; to dominate, to undermine her. This was, and is still, not God's will; however, He clearly revealed the consequences of the fall, a distortion and polarization of the intended roles and responsibilities God designed for a husband and wife. Thus, sin brought the potential for disharmony into every sphere of God's created order, including the marital covenant. The promise of the Messiah revealed God's intent to restore His original plan, including the worth and importance of woman and the pure original roles and responsibilities within the marriage covenant (Genesis 3:15).

After the fall, women sadly became tremendously marginalized (and degraded) in most ancient cultures. Yet even though the Old Testament is male-dominated, it stands head-and-shoulders above most of the religions of the ancient world in its humane treatment of women and appreciation of their worth and importance. Although God did not seek to tackle the chauvinism of the ancient world*, He did prophetically declare His intention to do so in the New Covenant. In anticipating the New Covenant, God declared: ***“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days”*** (Joel 2:28, 29).

*We do believe that in His restoration of mankind God, to some degree, accommodated certain cultural inconsistencies in His unfolding purpose. In this case, He only tackled the inconsistencies associated with the value and importance of women in the New Testament, allowing in the Old Testament an imbalance in male dominance only to be corrected in the New. For example, God allowed a man like David to marry several wives; a practice He then forbade in the New Testament. Another example, this time in the New Testament, is slavery. God never tackled this issue in the first century, accommodating this cultural inconsistency, while clearly sowing the seeds of slavery's destruction (Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1, 2; Philemon 16). Why would God accommodate various inconsistencies, only to correct them and restore His truth later in history? God simply chose to tackle some battles first before tackling others in the restoration of His people. Salvation itself was a process in which God accommodated unregenerate mankind through the ages, revealing His truth line upon line, before sending His Son at a specific chosen time in history.

Peter, in explaining the incredible outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost's morning, declared that this prophecy from Joel was at that very moment being fulfilled ushering in the New Covenant (Acts 2:14-39); offered to **“to all”...without exception** (v. 39)! Paul then also, in explaining the blessings of salvation to **“all,”** stresses: **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”** (Galatians 3:28). While this does not deny God's purpose in creating male and female, nor does it contradict His order in the marital relationship, it wonderfully expresses God's restoration of the value and importance of women. Paul continues: **“And if you [Jew and Greek...male and female] are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise”** (v. 29). Clearly, **“God shows personal favouritism to no man”** (Galatians 2:6).

The New Testament clearly upholds the “before the fall” distinctions in the role and responsibilities of the husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22-31). But let it be noted that while Paul devotes four verses to the wife's responsibility to **“submit”** to her husband as **“head”** (vv. 22-24, 33), he commits nine verses to the husband's responsibility to **“love [his] wife, just as Christ also loved the church”** (vv. 25-33). And while the number of verses may not have too much meaning, the choice of words to describe the husband's role certainly does have teeth to it: **“[give]...[wash]...[present]...love their own wives as their own bodies, [nourish] and [cherish]...love his own wife as himself”**.

If the husband would faithfully play his role, the wife would be empowered to play hers. Much is made of the women's responsibility to submit to her husband (and this is vital), but at least twice as much should be made of the husband's enormous responsibility to, in the grace of God, love his wife; unconditionally, selflessly and sacrificially, **“just as Christ also loved the church”**. After affirming the distinct roles within the marriage covenant, Peter then reminds us of God's intent for men and women to jointly rule together, and to enjoy this dynamic in the marriage covenant as **“heirs together of the grace of life”** (1 Peter 3:7).

As a husband, faithfulness to my God-given responsibility draws a gracious willingness from my wife to respect and submit to the God-given authority entrusted to me. My heart is never to “put her in her place” – the one act that would then confirm how out of place I am! Nor is it to degrade or belittle who she is or the gifts God has given her. In the areas of her giftedness I gladly and willingly submit to her; that is I submit to God who has given her the gifts. This in no way undermines my role as her husband*.

*This must be qualified. We do not believe that the Bible teaches mutual submission in the leadership of the marriage covenant. Yes, the Bible teaches mutual submission to one another's individual, God-given gifts. Thus, I can gladly receive and submit to my wife's gifts (I would be foolish not to!). However, with respect to the God-ordained role I have as head of my family, I cannot abdicate my responsibility. The phrase, **“[submit] to one another in the fear of God”** – just before Paul address the responsibilities in marriage – is often misunderstood (Ephesians 5:21). He is not referring to mutual submission, but calling us to **“[submit] to [those in authority over us]”**. He then addresses three key areas where this is to be directly applied: wives to their husbands (5:22-33), children to their parents (6:1-4) and servants to their masters (6:5-9). He clearly did not expect masters to be mutually submitted to their servants, or parents to be mutually submitted to their children. Thus it is inconsistent to read mutual submission in the marital relationship into these instructions. Furthermore, the phrase **“one another”** (Greek: *allelous*) does not refer to a reciprocal relationship; it does not mean “everyone to everyone”. For example, to **“bear one another's burdens”** (Galatians 6:2) does not mean that everyone must swap burdens with everyone else. It means that someone who is stronger should carry the burdens of another who is weaker.

Both Peter and Paul were following in the footsteps of Jesus who modelled a new, radical acceptance of women, their worth and importance. Not only were some of His best, most sincere disciples women (see for example, Matthew 26:6-13; John 12:1-8 and Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42) but He ensured that **“women”** were an essential part of those who **“continued with one accord in prayer and supplication”** in anticipation of the birth of the church (Acts 1:14). Jesus came to liberate all those in bondage and that certainly included women shackled in cultural and man-made chains. Let us now look at the New Testament passages on spiritual gifts and other related passages to determine the Bible’s teachings on women in ministry.

Women in ministry in Rome...

When Paul teaches the church in Rome concerning, what we refer to as, the motivational gifts (Romans 12:3-8), he gives no restrictions to women. He refers to **“everyone who is among you”** (v. 3) and encourages everyone to humbly use their gift to function as **“members of one another”** (v. 5). He then exhorts every believer, without exception, to use their gifts and proceeds to list seven gifts that includes the gift of prophecy (v. 6), teaching (v. 7) and leading (v. 8)*. He gives absolutely no restriction and defines no boundaries in which these gifts should or should not operate. Rather it is in this same letter that he mentions **“Phoebe our sister...a servant (Greek: *diakonia*) of the church in Cenchrrea”** (Romans 16:1), a reference to the leadership office of deacon.

In other words, the believers in Rome who read this letter would have taken the will of God to mean that both men and women could minister freely and without restriction in the gifts God had given them. It would not be right to assume that they would have had to wait some eight years for the “complete instructions” to be given to them via Paul’s letter to Timothy, who was hundreds of kilometres away in Ephesus, that then added what some feel is a restriction that forbids women to teach or lead (in 1 Timothy 2:12).

The same could be said about Peter’s counsel: **“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it with the ability which God supplies...”** (1 Peter 4:10, 11). Again, Peter gives no restriction and defines no boundaries in which any person was to use their God-given gifts. It is also notable that in his counsel to the wives of unbelieving men he does directly urge them to win their husbands **“without a word,”** teaching them that the **“conduct of their lives”** would reveal Christ to their husbands. If it was “church policy” that women were not to speak or teach men at all, Peter would not have had to directly stress this point. And there is an implied challenge here in Peter’s exhortation to us as believing men. It is our ungodly, unregenerate male ego that makes it difficult for us to receive instruction from our wives. To the degree that we battle to receive God’s word through our wives; to that degree we need the Spirit to soften our hard hearts.

From both these apostolic letters we conclude that women can have these motivational gifts (including the gifts of prophecy, teaching and leading) and should thus be expected to faithfully function in the gifts that God has given them.

*The gift of teaching and leading should be distinguished from the office of the teacher and from leadership offices in the Bible. We will look at this below.

Women in ministry in Corinth...

When Paul teaches on, what we call, the manifestation gifts of the Spirit to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), he again gives no restrictions to women in these gifts. He is emphatic: **“But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all”** (v. 7), having just one chapter earlier referred to women who pray and prophecy in the gatherings of the church (1 Corinthians 11:5). He continues to encourage the Corinthian believers to all contribute when they **“come together”**: **“each of you [can have] a psalm...a teaching...a revelation...”** (1 Corinthians 14:26)*.

Therefore, women can have and should be expected to operate in the manifestation gifts and, in fact, this chapter implies that the same freedom extends to, what we call, the ministry gifts. After teaching about the importance of every member of the body, Paul then writes: **“Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations...”** (vv. 27, 28). There are simply no restrictions given to prohibit women in ministry. Any believing women reading this passage could rightly assume that the Lord was inviting her to not only value the contribution of every other believer, but to also expect others to value her contribution in the body of Christ. And she could rightly assume that women had access to the manifestation gifts and the ministry gifts (Ephesians 4:11), based on the leading of the Spirit and calling of God respectively. Before we look specifically at these ministry gifts, let us look at other key passages in 1 Corinthians that refer to women in ministry.

The main problem in their gatherings: disorder!

Throughout Chapters 11-14 of his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul addresses the disorder that contaminated their public gatherings as a church and that discredited their testimony in Corinth. After teaching them on the principle of love versus liberty (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) – the principle that we are to restrain our liberty if love demands it – Paul then refers to his own example in this (1 Corinthians 9:1-27; 10:1-11:1). Off the back of this self-disclosure, he then appeals to them to exercise this same principle. The Corinthian church were reveling in extreme expressions of the freedom they now enjoyed in Christ, and were doing so in ways that broke the law of love, resulting in chaos and disorder in their gatherings. Specifically, Paul addresses their lack of wisdom in expressing their freedom in culturally sensitive issues of clothing (1 Corinthians 11:2-16), the divisions and drunkenness around the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34) and the selfish use and abuse of the manifestation gifts of the Spirit, especially the hyper-expressions of a perceived spiritual elite (1 Corinthians 12-14).

*Some may point to Paul’s use of the word **“brethren”** in this verse to imply that he was addressing the men alone. Not only is this inconsistent with these chapters but it is inconsistent with the way Paul used the word **“brethren”**. This word **“brethren”** was used inclusively to refer to all the members of the church, a word referring to the family of God; the body and bride of Christ (see for example, Galatians 3:15-29, especially vv. 15, 26-28).

While there seemed to be a number of problematic believers in this church, the way Paul tackles these issues clearly reveals that the actions of some *married women*, if not a large part of the problem, were certainly fuelling the fires of disorder and confusion. Secular writers also recorded some of the excesses of women in the church in the first century. Up to this time, women had no meaningful role to play in the religions of the day, including Judaism. They were not invited to participate in religious activity and were fortunate if they could even be a spectator to it.

Historically, one of the reasons women flocked to Christ was the value He and His church gave to them, and the opportunity to, for the first time, contribute meaningfully to their community of faith. Like many prisoners set free, many women then went to the extreme in expressing their new found freedom. In retaliation to centuries of male chauvinism, many women broke out of their male-imposed shackles with an intensity that exceeded godly boundaries of respect and dignity. Certainly we can sympathize with any person imprisoned from God's will and understand that in being set free, time will be required before godly boundaries are embraced. But without doubt, this issue underlined some of the Corinthian church's problems. The way Paul deals with this is a master stroke, but then again the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and counsel.

He begins to tackle the problems in their church gatherings with this phrase: **“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of women is man, and the head of Christ is God”** (1 Corinthians 11:3). Not only does Paul begin to tackle disorder by starting at the place of God's order of authority – **“the head of Christ is God”** – but certainly implies that, at least, part of the problem in Corinth was caused by disorderly, *married women** – **“the head of women is man”**.

*It is worth noting immediately that the phrase, **“the head of woman is man,”** is a reference to the order God established in the *marital relationship*. Women are not called to submit to men in general; the wife is called to submit to her husband in the marriage covenant. This is a “husband and wife” issue, not a “man and woman” issue.

Fashion or attitudes?

The first issue he brings up concerns whether women should wear head coverings and whether men should grow their hair long in first century Corinth. Why was this such an issue? It was custom in the known world of the first century for women to wear a head covering. Christian women, in the name of freedom in Christ, wanted to be free from this cultural tradition and to abandon wearing head gear. The problem was that women who appeared without a head covering in public were considered loose and immoral. Prostitutes – and there were many in Corinth – distinguished themselves by appearing bareheaded. Paul uses the principle of love versus liberty to counsel these Christian women: yes, they are free in Christ, and thus free from cultural traditions, but because appearing bareheaded would associate them with loose and immoral women, draw unnecessary attention to themselves and discredit the testimony of the church, it was not wise to do so.

Paul balances the discussion by similarly urging the men not to grow their hair long as again, in the city of Corinth, male prostitutes abounded; dressing in feminine ways which included growing long hair. This was a cultural issue specific to Corinth that brought confusion and disorder to the church community. For in Jerusalem, men grew their hair long...but certainly not in feminine ways.

Some ask: “If the issue in Chapter 11:2-16 was a relatively small, cultural problem, why did Paul get so technical about the created order of male and female?” Although the issue he deals with was, on the surface, relatively small, the heart of the matter was a growing defiance of certain people against authority in the name of freedom. “God has set me free so I can do what I want to!” would probably have defined the attitude of many of those causing the problems in the church. Freedom was being used as a cloak for rebellious attitudes, and women were certainly among those most adamant to express their freedom having been previously most imprisoned. Paul gets technical in this chapter; not because he is tackling the relatively small, cultural issue of fashion, but because he is addressing the underlying rebellious attitudes and in so doing, lays a foundation upon which he can address the other issues creating disorder. He not only calls everyone to order under God’s authority but builds the platform to address the married women, who as we will see soon, were undermining God’s order in marriage.

Married women: free but wise...

After addressing abuses around the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34), Paul then addresses the use, and in their case, the abuse of the manifestation gifts of the Spirit in their celebratory gatherings as a church (1 Corinthians 12-14). As noted earlier, he clearly encourages all – *without exception or restriction* – to participate, giving specific guidelines to do so in a way that is orderly, but then brings his challenge to a head: **“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace...Let all things be done decently and in order”** (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). Sandwiched in this conclusion, Paul briefly – in just two verses, compared to the reams of counsel he has already written to address the issues of the heart – speaks directly to the women who were out of order.

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church” (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35).

At first reading, it appears that Paul forbade women speaking at all in the gathering of the church. Obviously this is a good example of why we must not take a verse or passage out of context *because this was not what Paul was saying*. He was not forbidding women to speak in all instances of the church gathering; that would be in direct contradiction of what he said a few chapters earlier – **“every woman who prays or prophesies”** (11:5) – and what he implied just a few verses earlier – **“whenever you come together, each of you...”** (14:26). Let us be clear: Paul did not forbid women from speaking or ministering in church.

So what did Paul mean? Paul forbade inappropriate, disorderly expressions that did not edify the gathering. If the men were guilty of this, he would tell them to **“keep silent”** as he, in fact, does when he tells both men and women, who think they should minister in the gift of tongues but discern that there is no gift of interpretation present, to do so: **“But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church”** (14:28).

This is an important point. Paul was not forbidding women to “speak in church,” *he was forbidding both men and women from speaking in any way that brought disorder to the church’s gathering*. If someone was acting disorderly in the celebration gatherings, Paul would have exhorted them to “keep silent” whether they were men or women. Because the women were most guilty in this case, Paul speaks directly to them in these verses.

What was inappropriate about the women’s’ behaviour? All we can gather from this passage is that some *married* women were in some way *undermining their husbands*. We cannot be sure in what way they were doing so* but the focus of Paul’s exhortation in these two verses makes this a “husband and wife issue” not a “man and women issue”. The word “women” (Greek: *gune*) should be translated “wife” and the context of the passage clearly identifies that the issue revolves around marital relationships: “if they – married women are the subject – want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home”.

*One thought is that an “elitist” group was emerging, claiming spiritual superiority over others (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 3:18-23; 4:6, 7), and some wives were using this to belittle their seemingly less spiritual husbands. These married women may have even begun to draw inappropriately close to a seemingly spiritual “male guru figure(s)” other than their husbands (similar to pagan cults of the time); thus Paul’s stress: “let them ask their own husbands at home”. A less dramatic thought is simply that, because women had been excluded from participation in their faith, their questions were of a nature that were basic enough to be worked through at home with their husbands. Revisiting the “basics” at every gathering was unnecessary if husbands and wives talked through these issues of faith at home.

Furthermore, Paul writes that “they are to be submissive, as the law also says”. The law only required women to submit to their “own” husbands, not to men in general; clearly indicating that Paul was addressing married women who were being disorderly. This again is crucial. We cannot build a doctrine from these verses to restrict women in ministry; the issue in this case was that some married women were abusing their new found freedom in the Christian community by undermining their husbands publicly. This is inappropriate in every age; in both the first century and the twenty-first century. Thus, there two verses could be read as:

“Let your [wives] keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to [undermine their husbands]; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to [learn or argue], let them [discuss it with] their own husbands at home [in private]; for it is shameful for women to speak in church [inappropriately]” (14:34, 35).

The fact that some of the women in Corinth abused their freedom in Christ should never justify an attempt to put women back in shackles...absolutely not! We must be the champions of the worth and importance of women, and we must as followers of Christ do all in our power to break the shackles of any person imprisoned from God’s best for their lives. The church should be the biggest proponent of the dignity and value of women! When we do this wisely and well, women will not need to go to extreme measures to free and express themselves. The church needs secure men who recognize and release their God-given privilege to express their God-given abilities.

Thank God for Anna...

When Paul teaches on the ministry gifts (Ephesians 4:7-11) – we prefer to use the phrase, “equipping gifts” – he again makes no exception or restriction: **“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...”** (Ephesians 4:7, 11). Although the references to those with equipping gifts in the New Testament are mainly to men, with only one clear exception, we cannot then conclude that women are exempt from being equipping gifts. Again, Paul gives no restriction in this passage and we dare not draw lines where the Bible itself does not.

Anna was called a **“prophetess”** (Luke 2:36-38)*. Paul refers to **“Phoebe our sister”** and calls her a **“servant of the church in Cenchrea”** (Romans 16:1). This more than likely refers to her leadership office as a **“deacon”** rather than an equipping gift, but we cannot be completely sure. Paul also refers to **“Junia”** as an apostle. Although Junia is a woman’s name; it could also be a shortened form of the male name “Junianus”. Again, we cannot be sure. Luke mentions **“Philip, the evangelist”** and his four daughters **“who prophesied”** (Acts 21:8, 9). Although he does not call them “prophetesses,” the fact that he refers to them as those **“who prophesied”** does draw special attention to them and may imply that there was a consistency about their ministry as prophetesses. Again we cannot be absolutely sure.

But what we can be sure of is that there is at least one Biblical reference to a woman having an equipping gift. If the designation that Paul gave Phoebe is a deacon not an equipping gift; if Junia was a man not a woman; and if Philip’s daughters simply prophesied but were not prophetesses, we would still be able to say, “Thank God for Anna! He does gift some women as equipping gifts!” The lack of references to women being equipping gifts is not a restriction to women being called in this capacity. Jesus only mentioned the need to be **“born again”** once...but we all know the importance of this truth.

*Some dispensationalists will want to relegate this verse to the Old Testament claiming that this reference to Anna was before the cross, thus pre-New Testament. The same dispensationalists would never dare to question the authenticity of John the baptizer’s mantle as a prophet. Anna was a prophetess, honoured by the Spirit of God, and we should not undermine her place in God’s revelation by imposing on the New Testament a dispensational grid. And even by doing so, dispensationalists only remind us of other women who served effectively and mightily as leaders and prophets in the Old Testament (Deborah, Judges 4:1-5:31 and Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14-20). The same honour and respect given to them should be likewise given to women called in this capacity today.

Some maintain that the ministry gifts were only given in Jesus’ ascension (Ephesians 4:7-11); thus Anna was an Old Testament prophet, not a New Testament equipping gift. This denies the fact that God creates us by design. Before His ascension, Jesus chose twelve men who each had the embryonic equipping gift of apostle in their God-created make up. (Matthew 10:2). Jesus did not wait until His ascension to only then willy-nilly hand out gifts of grace; rather His ascension activated the gift within them, a gift entrusted to them when God formed them in the womb in line with their God-designed purpose (Psalm 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; 2 Timothy 1:9-11). Anna’s ministry would not have ceased through Jesus’ ascension, if she lived that long. Entrusted with the gift of prophet, her ministry would have been enlarged through His ascension!

The confusing passage: 1 Timothy 2:12-15

This brings us to the most controversial passage concerning women in ministry: Paul's instructions in his first letter to Timothy. Again the context is vital. Paul, in his apostolic authority, sends Timothy to Ephesus and *entrusts him with the task of upholding apostolic doctrine, to combat false doctrine and the heresies spawning the province of Asia Minor* (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 18-20). After committing to Timothy this apostolic charge, Paul then proceeds to teach on the importance of honouring God-given authority in three key areas: civil government (1 Timothy 2:1-7), the marriage covenant (1 Timothy 2:8-15) and church leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-16).

He does so in order to urge Timothy to equip the church to stand firm in apostolic doctrine and to combat the lawlessness of the age. Straight into Chapter 4, he writes: **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...”** (v. 1). The point is clear: to prevail against this spirit of lawlessness we must be submitted to, and thus protected by, God's authority in these three arenas.

After reminding Timothy to urge the church to honour their political and civil government – so that the government of our King may prevail (1 Timothy 2:1-7) – he was quick to remind them where their ultimate allegiance lies...to God alone: **“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands...”** (1 Timothy 2:8). Here Paul specifically mentions **“the men”** because only men had legal status in the secular world; only men would have platform to take up aggressive, antagonist positions against the civil government. Women had no legal status at all and no platform to express anti-authority notions; thus this exhortation was not relevant to them. Paul was urging the men to **“pray”** and worship God rather than take up any anti-government position. To do so would not be consistent with apostolic doctrine.

Having specifically addressed **“the men,”** Paul then encourages **“the women”** to play their part as godly citizens in their day* (vv, 9, 10). This then leads him to the second arena wherein God-given authority must be honoured as evidence of true apostolic doctrine: *the marital relationship*. As in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35, Paul first and foremost urges married women to submit to their husbands**. Again, the word **“woman”** (Greek: *gune*) could be translated **“wife”** and the word **“man”** (Greek: *aner*) could be translated **“husband”**. Again he uses the word **“submission,”** a direct reference to the married woman's responsibility to her husband. Thus, this is again not a general call for all women to subject themselves to all men. Verse 11 could be read as: **“Let a [wife] learn in silence with all submission [to her husband]”**.

*While women should still heed Paul's direct exhortation to them; they should also, with the same civil privileges and opportunities afforded to them now that were then only afforded to men, heed his exhortation to **“the men”** of that first century. Although there may be times when he submissively disobey secular government; that is when they directly contradict Scripture, we can still do so in an honouring way (1 Peter 2:13-17 c. Acts 4:18-21).

**The fact that Paul is less specific here in comparison to his counsel in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 is (1) he was not directly addressing a problem in this case, and (2) he was reminding Timothy of a principle that he would have been familiar with. Timothy was party to writing Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:1) and would have been well acquainted with the “disorder issue”.

Paul then continues: **“I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence”** (1 Timothy 2:12). He did not say, **“I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority” period**. This would be in contradiction of the passages we looked at above concerning women who have God-given gifts to teach, for example. And several Biblical passages refer to women who had a degree of authority in the church: **“Phoebe”** who was at very least a **“deacon”** (Romans 16:1), **“Chloe”** (1 Corinthians 1:11), Mark’s mother **“Mary”** (Acts 12:12) and **“Euodia”** (Philippians 4:2, 3), who from the phraseology used in these passages, all carried some authority in the church; and the recipient of John’s second epistle, **“the elect lady,”** who was given instructions concerning whom she allowed to minister in her **“house”** – a reference to a home church. Women in leadership will take centre stage in our discussion soon.

Thus Paul did not forbid a woman from teaching or having authority in any and every case. One consistent reminder he made was to forbid a woman to usurp authority **“over [her husband in the marital relationship]”**. But there does seem to be a second application to this if we understand Paul’s flow of counsel here: from authority to (1) secular government to (2) the marriage covenant and to (3) church leadership. Having reminded Timothy of the importance of God’s order in the marriage relationship, he clearly carries this principle into the senior leadership of church, namely eldership (1 Timothy 3:1-7). After referring to the “husband and wife” relationship in one sentence (v. 11), he writes, **“And I do not permit a woman to...”** (v.12). The language implies a continuation from the first thought into the second; a transfer of a principle from the marriage covenant into church leadership. Verse 12 could be read as: **“I do not permit a woman to [independently] teach or to have [independent] authority over a man”**.

Of course, no person should independently teach or have independent authority over any other person. We should ask the question: “Is this person ministering, doing so under authority?” We sit under the unaccountable ministry of another to our own ruin (Matthew 24:4, 5; Acts 20:29, 30; 1 Timothy 6:3-5). So what is Paul stressing here with regards to women? In asking whether a married woman is under authority, ***her point of reference is her husband***; we should ask: “Is she rightly related to her husband?” At the risk of redundancy, this is not because she is inferior to men; it is not because she cannot teach or have authority in the church. ***It is because the blessing she brings in public ministry must in no way bring disharmony to her marriage.*** It was crucial to Paul for women in ministry to do so and not undermine the order God had established in their marriage. The phrase, **“to be in silence”** (v. 12), forbids a person from ministering inappropriately; in this case, referring to a women ministering independently.

Paul is concerned about consistency. This is the same reason Paul taught concerning the honouring of civil government in the first place. Have you ever wondered why Paul would spend time reminding us to submit to secular authority in a letter concerning church related issues? He was determined that a church, in ministering in their city, should not undermine God’s will in their society. In the same way, he was determined that a woman, in ministering in the church, should not undermine God’s will in her marriage. In both cases, his purpose was to uphold apostolic doctrine.

Church leadership: a reflection of God's order in the family...

In carrying the principle of marital order into church leadership, Paul anchors this in the created order of man and woman: **“For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression”** (1 Timothy 2:13, 14). He refers to the order of creation, not as a matter of structural hierarchy as stated earlier, but to highlight the fact that in creating man first God equipped the husband to be better suited as the primary leader in the marital relationship. Eve's ***God-given relational orientation*** made her more open and empathetic, and thus more susceptible to Satan's deception in this case (vv. 13, 14). While this strength in a woman's created nature completes her husband in this area, his ***God-given functional orientation***, especially his essential suitability to lead, completes his wife too.

Without the wife, the husband is incomplete in his contribution; without the husband, the wife is incomplete in her contribution. This does not mean that some women cannot be more functional and analytical in their nature; nor does it mean that some men are not more relational and intuitive in theirs. There is a wonderful spectrum of variation in both men and women and we must celebrate each individual in their uniqueness and beauty. However, it does not take away from the responsibilities God has entrusted to each man and woman in the marriage covenant. And this is the point. ***Paul reveals that the same protection and completeness God instilled in the marital relationship order should under-gird church leadership too.*** The church is to be a reflection and extension of the order He established in the family. This does not mean that women cannot use the teaching or leadership gifts that God has given to them (Romans 12:3-8), only that they must do so in a way that honours their husbands and in doing so, reflect a God-glorifying marriage.

Interdependence...

The character requirements outlined in Chapter 3 rest the office of an elder on the husband (vv. 1-7; see also Titus 1:5-9). However, this in no way undermines the role of women in ministry and leadership. Just as a husband's headship in the family does not undermine the crucial role of a woman as wife and mother, neither does the fact that the office of an elder rests on the husband.

In fact, a strict reading of these verses would make it inconsistent for a man to be appointed independently as an elder in himself. While the office of an elder rests on the man; in the same way that a husband, without his wife, is incomplete in revealing God as he parents his family; so a man, without his wife, is incomplete in revealing God as he parents the church. ***When a husband and wife are rightly aligned to God and one another; by the grace of God, they together reveal the fullness and completeness of the Godhead to their family and to the church.*** Paul refers to this interdependence: **“neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord”** (1 Corinthians 11:11). Thus as headship rests on the husband in the nuclear family, ***balanced by true interdependence between husband and wife***; the same must surely be true in the church family.

We live in a day, not altogether unlike the first century, where the family is decimated and single-parent homes abound. As people from broken marriages and single-parenthood find God's saving grace begin to grow into the character requirements of leadership we have some obvious challenges to face. However, in team, as we honour these important, Biblically non-negotiable areas of submission we can uphold apostolic order and represent the heart and counsel of God. Thus, the issue is not whether or not women can serve in leadership...they can and should...the issue, is whether all those serving as leaders do so from a place of credibility in their marriage and families.

For example, there is a good case to argue that Paul presents a picture of the *ideal* – not optional, but also not absolute – *in the nuclear family requirements of an elder*. The integrity of an elder is non-negotiable but is it a strict or ideal requirement that an elder has children? Is it a strict or ideal requirement that an elder be married? Although Timothy was not an elder – he was an equipping gift serving on Paul's apostolic team – his character would have had to fulfil these requirements; and of course, he was not married. Thus...is it a strict or ideal requirement that the office of an elder rest on a man? The intention is not to muddy the waters here but to make a crucial point: there is no Biblical restriction on women in ministry or leadership; Paul's purpose was to define the church as family, *and to ensure that the leadership of the church family did not undermine God's designed order in the nuclear families represented*. To do so would be a departure from apostolic doctrine...and would fail to equip us against lawlessness.

Women deacons...

It is worth noting that Paul's teaching on the leadership office of a deacon welcomes women into this office in their own right. The office of a deacon is the secondary leadership office in the local church; eldership being the primary leadership office. Sadly, a deacon has often been relegated to that of an "usher" or church steward in modern day applications but the Bible reveals that it is a definite leadership office requiring mature character (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Firstly, the order and language that Paul uses to address the requirements of elders and deacons reveals that the eldership is the primary, parental role and the deaconate is the secondary, "older brother/sister" role in the church. Secondly, in the opening chapters of Acts we have an example of the apostles' serving as a "type-of" eldership, choosing to prioritize their focus on "**prayer and the ministry of the word**" (Acts 6:4). When a problem emerged in the church they entrusted the "**seven**" to serve as a "type-of" deaconate to address the issue. Although neither the words "elders" nor "deacons" are used, this passage is a proto-type of the two levels of leadership that Paul reveals in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, (1) a primary, *parental office* and (2) a secondary, *supportive office*. It is vital to note that the seven chosen were of mature spiritual character (Acts 6:3, 5) and they were entrusted with more than menial tasks; they were entrusted with people, their prejudices and disputes (vv. 1, 3, 7).

Although the “seven” were all men, women were also recognized as deacons in the early church (Romans 16:1) and the passage in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 indicates that Paul was addressing women deacons not just the wives of men deacons. Paul begins his outline of the requirements for deacons by writing, “**Likewise deacons must be...**” (v. 8). He then writes, “**Likewise, *their* wives must be reverent...**” (v. 11). The word “**their**” was added at the privilege of the translators and is not present in the original text; hence, the italics in the NKJV.

The word “**wives**” should be translated “**women**” as the context does not specifically address “the wives of men deacons” but instead addresses women deacons: “**Likewise deacons must be... likewise women must be...**” (vv. 8, 11). While the next verse does directly address men deacons (v. 12), the passage clearly applies to women serving in this leadership office. What would be the only guiding restriction? If she is married, a women deacon must be rightly related to her husband; her leadership as a deacon should not undermine the harmony of her marriage.

A call to secure men...

We trust that this article will flush out the confusion surrounding some passages of Scripture that have often been used to restrict women in ministry and make women feel inferior. *The God-established arrangement in marriage was never meant to restrict the potential or purpose of women; and carrying this principle into church leadership only seeks to give the same protection and completeness to the church family that God established in the nuclear family.*

Even as Esther felt marginalized, a slave maiden of a pagan king, her uncle Mordecai recognized her worth and importance to God and her people. Mordecai’s famous words resonate through the ages: “**Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:14). We need secure men and husbands who, in the Spirit of their Master, will purpose to champion the worth and importance of women so that the priesthood of all believers – *without exception or restriction* – will be released at “**such a time as this**”. No prisoner should champion his (or in this case, her) own freedom; otherwise, exaggerated and often extreme reactions will occur. Too many women have had to fight for their God-given privilege (and responsibility) to minister in fulfilment of the Lord’s call upon their lives because they have been restricted by insecure men. This is a call for secure men to, in the Spirit of Jesus, receive and release women into their call and destiny purpose.

Such a time is now!

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