

BIBLICAL CASE FOR BOTH CONVICTIONS ON WOMEN IN OFFICE

In 1995 the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America approved this recommendation: *that synod recognize that there are two different... convictions, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God, on the issue of whether women are allowed to serve in the offices of elder and minister.*

The Historic Conviction: God's purpose is for men only to serve as ministers and elders

1. The Old Testament passages

1.1 Genesis 1:26-27

Genesis 1:26-27 affirms that humankind, both male and female, was created in the image of God. Together men and women reflect God's image and carry out God's creation mandate: to rule over the earth on God's behalf.

1.2 Genesis 2: especially 20-24

The account of creation in Genesis 2 complements the account in Genesis 1. Here the man has a certain priority, a *firstness*. Adam was created before Eve, and he gave the *woman* her name (vs. 23). It is implied that this priority is applied to marriage (vs. 24). Genesis 2 is meant to complement- not overturn- what is said about the mutual equality of male and female in Genesis 1. So the implied male priority in marriage does not mean the subjugation of the wife to the husband. In fact, their equality is suggested by the woman as a *helper suitable* for man (vs 18). This phrase can best be understood as an equal *companion* and not just an *assistant*.

1.3 Genesis 3- especially vs. 16-20:

Genesis 3 recounts the story of the fall. The curse pronounced upon the woman states not only that the pain of bearing children will increase but also that *he will rule over you* (vs. 16), referring to the husband's role in marriage.

There seem to be both continuity and discontinuity between what is established in creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and what is stated in the curse in Genesis 3. In Genesis 2 man is called to work and take care of the garden (vs. 15). In Genesis 3 it is assumed that his work continues, but after the fall he will work a land that is cursed, and he will toil with pain and sweat (vs. 17-19). In like manner, after the fall the woman will continue to bear children and be under her husband's leadership. But, due to the fall, child-bearing will be painful, and her relationship to her husband strained, since **he will rule over you** (vs. 16). In the context of the curse, this probably means an oppressive kind of rule. But in no way does Genesis 3 invalidate the male priority of Genesis 2.

1.4 The rest of the Old Testament

The male's priority and leadership function in marriage, as established in Genesis 2, is extended in the rest of the Old Testament to male leadership among God's people. We find that with the patriarchs- Abraham, Issac and Jacob. Among God's people the leadership roles of prophet, judge, king and priest were filled by men.

What about Miriam and Huldah who served as prophets (Exodus 15:20-21; II Kings 22:14-20; II Chronicles 34:22-28)? They are exceptions to the rule. They highlight that from the time of Moses on, all of the prophets, with only these two exceptions, were men. Deborah's leadership as prophetess and judge is characterized as an exception designed to shame the males who seem to have abdicated their proper leadership roles (Judges 4:4-10). In the accounts of the priesthood in Israel, there are no exceptions: only males functioned as priests.

Thus male leadership in marriage, as established in Genesis 2 and carried into life in Israel throughout the Old Testament, seems to have God's approval and might be expected to be carried on in the new-covenant community.

2. The New Testament passages (four key passages):

2.1 Male headship in marriage: **Ephesians 5:22-25**

Male leadership in marriage is clearly continued under the new covenant. The husband is called *the head of the wife* (Ephesians 5:23). The wife is instructed to *submit* to her husband (Ephesians 5:22, 24; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1). It is important to remember that Paul, in Ephesians 5:25-33, emphasizes that the husband must exercise headship out of love, as exemplified in Christ's own self-giving love for the church. Here male headship in marriage that was established in creation (Gen. 2:24, quoted in Ephesians. 5:31) continues in the new covenant, modeled after the headship of Jesus with his people.

2.2 Male headship in the church: **I Corinthians 11:2-16**

Did the male leadership among God's people during the old covenant continue in the church? Note that Jesus chose only male apostles, though he showed great love and respect for women. Likewise, though Paul had female helpers, it seems he appointed only men as elders (Acts 14:23; I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The Old Testament pattern seems to have continued into the New Testament.

In regard to how men and women should pray/prophesy in the church, Paul states: **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** (I Cor. 11:3).¹ In what sense is man the *head* of the woman? That is best understood by asking how Christ is the *head* of every man, since Paul speaks of that headship in this sentence. In some passages Christ's headship over the church seems to combine both the idea of *source* and *authority over*. For example, Colossians 1:18 affirms Christ to be **head of his body, the church**. Then Paul says Christ is **the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy**. Here, *beginning* and *firstborn* suggest *source*, but *supremacy* suggests rulership or *have authority over*. In Ephesians 5:24 the church is said to *submit to Christ as head*, but at the same time Christ gives himself up for the church (Ephesians. 5:25-27).

¹ Here two major problems of interpretation must be noted. Admittedly, when Christ is spoken of as "head" in other passages, the term "head" (*kephalē*) can have two senses: one which implies "authority over" (as in Eph. 1:22, Christ as "head over everything for the church"; probably also in Col. 2:10); the other implies the meaning "source" (as in Col. 2:19, Christ is the "head, from whom the whole body . . . grows as God causes it to grow"; also in Eph. 4:15-16). The issue is how Paul is using the term here. (A subsidiary problem here is that when applied to either man or woman, the term "head" can mean either his or her own physical "head" or be used in a metaphorical way to mean "Christ" or "man" [I Cor. 11:4-7a]). The second major problem is to determine what relationship between "man" and "woman" is being referred to in this passage. Paul uses the term for the male (*anēr*) that can mean either "man" or "husband" and the term for the female (*gynē*) than can mean either "woman" or "wife." In what sense are they intended here?

So, when I Corinthians 11:3 says that **the head of every man is Christ**, it is likely that it refers both to source *and* rulership. Further, when the text states that **the head of Christ is God**, it likely combines the same two notions; as to Jesus' human nature, God is Christ's creator and the one to whom Jesus submits. It seems likely then, that when the text affirms that **the head of woman is the man**, the same two notions of *source* and *authority over* are present.

The passage goes on to affirm that while praying and prophesying in the church a distinction between man and woman must be maintained: the woman must pray/prophesy with her head covered, the man with his head uncovered. Paul specifically wants women to maintain a visible expression of male headship in the church because **man did not come from woman but woman from man; neither was man created for woman but woman for man** (I Cor. 11:8-9).

This passage does not argue for differing roles for men and women in the church but only for the *manner* in which they carry out their roles. Paul seems to undercut any chauvinistic feelings of superiority on the part of the man when he adds: **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** (I Corinthians. 11:11-12).

2.3 Women to be silent in the church: I Corinthians 14:33b-36

Paul says in I Corinthians 14: **As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches.**

This clearly speaks of a role distinction: **women should remain silent in the churches.**

Why should women remain silent? Paul explains in vs. 34: **they are not permitted to speak but must be in submission, even as the Law says.** There is no passage in the Old Testament that explicitly says what Paul here states by the word *Law*. Still, Paul likely refers to the principle of male headship conveyed in Genesis 2, since he alludes to that passage in I Corinthians 11:9.

At the same time, this passage should not be read as calling for closed-lipped worship by women- that they should not sing, read Scripture or offer prayer. The intent is to oppose disruptive, authoritative teaching in a worship service.

Instead the women are advised in verse 35: **If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home.** Male headship in church worship precludes a woman from authoritative instruction. Paul indicates this is so, not only in the churches of Corinth but also **in all the congregations of the saints.** (I Corinthians. 14:33).

2.4 Women not permitted to teach authoritatively: **I Timothy 2:9-15**

Perhaps the clearest text in which male headship limits the authority of women in the church is I Timothy 2:9-15. In vs. 11 Paul says *that* women *should* learn and *how* they should learn- **in quietness and full submission**. He explicitly states- vs. 12: **I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.**

The arena to which Paul refers *seems* to be not just marriage, but the church, since I Timothy 2-3 seems to be a unit. In I Timothy 3:15 Paul says he gave these instructions so **you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God.**

The meaning of verse 12 is crucial, though there are three disputable issues.² It seems likely but not totally certain, given what Paul says in I Corinthians 14, that he refers here to one of the disputable issues: **authoritative instruction**. On the precise meaning of the word *authentain*: there are studies by scholars that support the meaning *to have authority over*. Although the word had a variety of meanings, in contexts such as the passage here the word most likely means *to have authority over* without distorted domineering. Though the reference to childbearing in vs. 15 indicates Paul has married women in mind, it seems better not to limit the reference to married women, since the reference here is to the whole church + there may have been single women present. Male priority in the church thus forbids women to engage in authoritative teaching, and this fits with what Paul says in I Timothy 3. Though in I Timothy 3:11 Paul may permit women to serve as deacons, in I Timothy 3:2-7 he limits the office of elder to men.

Paul may be addressing a specific problem in Ephesus: see I Timothy. 1:3-7. Yet he grounds his admonition in the biblical accounts of creation and the fall. The reference in I Timothy 2:13- **For Adam was formed first, then Eve-** is a clear reference to Genesis 2:4-25. In I Timothy 2:14 Paul refers to what Eve says: **The serpent deceived me + I ate.** (Genesis 3:13) Paul does not excuse Adam (see Romans 5:12-19) but indicates what may happen when proper roles of men and women are reversed. Since Paul grounds his admonition in creation and the fall, there is good reason to conclude that male headship applies today.

² First, it is not clear whether Paul is addressing two issues—women are not permitted to teach men and women are not permitted to have authority over men—or only one issue—women are not permitted to teach with authority over men. In many ways the impact for the church is the same with either meaning. Given what Paul states in I Cor. 14, it seems more likely that he is referring to "authoritative instruction." Second, the precise meaning of the word *authentain* (often translated "have authority over") is disputed. The word occurs only here in the New Testament. The old King James Version translates it as "to usurp authority over," which suggests a domineering kind of authority. But many modern translations, including the NIV, render it simply as "to have authority over." Third, as in I Corinthians 11, the words for male and female can have the more general meaning of "man" and "woman" or the meaning specific to the marriage relationship, "husband" and "wife."

I Timothy 2:15 is difficult to interpret. One plausible interpretation is to understand the word *sôthêsetai* to mean *will be kept safe*, as in the NIV text. Then the text may appropriately be seen in terms of covenant curse and blessing. The curse had been pronounced in Genesis 3:16: pain in childbearing. But Paul now assures Christian mothers not only that they will be spared from suffering too much pain but also that they will receive the covenant blessing- **if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.**

In summary: the case for excluding women from the role of elder or minister rests on the consistent teaching of Scripture, which has its root in the creation of men and women, is exhibited in both old and new covenants, and seems to be clearly taught in several New Testament letters. To overturn it, there would have to be other clear and compelling biblical evidence to the contrary. There are some passages in the New Testament that are thought to contradict male headship in the church. These passages will be briefly considered.

3 Three passages which seem to disagree with this part of the biblical witness:

3.1 Galatians 3:28

When Paul speaks in Galatians 3:27 of new-covenant believers having become sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, he grounds this in the fact that those who were baptized into Christ have become clothed with Christ. He then goes on to say: **There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.** The primary truth is that salvation by faith in Christ applies to all, including male and female. The text does have social implications, as Paul's controversy with Peter in Galatians 2:11-14 indicates; no longer may Jews and Gentiles separate themselves in table fellowship. But this text does not speak directly to whether may serve as an elder or deacon.

3.2 Acts 2:14-21; Joel 2:28-32

In his Pentecost sermon Peter indicates that the outpouring of the Spirit fulfills **in the last days** the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. God, speaking through Joel, promised: **I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.**

There are indeed new leadership roles for women under the new covenant- daughters of Philip had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9), and the women at Corinth prophesied (I Corinthians. 11:5). But Acts 2:14-21 does not prove that all with the Spirit are qualified to serve as elder/minister.

3.3 Women associated with Paul's work: **Romans 16** etc.

In Romans 16:1 Phoebe is called a *diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea.

The term can mean *servant* or *minister* or *deacon*.

In this place it is usually translated *deaconess*. She probably engaged in the ministry of hospitality that is suggested also by the word "helper" (*prostatis*) in Romans 16:2.

In Romans 16:5 and 12 several women are characterized as *workers* in the Lord. This is significant because Paul sometimes uses the same word to describe church leaders (I Thessalonians 5:12), including the work of preaching and teaching (I Timothy 5:17).

Yet, since the Greek word is a general word for *work*, it may not be assumed that these women held roles of leadership.

Similarly, some women are called *fellow-workers* with Paul (Philippians 4:2-3; Romans 16:3).

We know Priscilla and Aquila, mentioned in Romans 16:3, ministered to Apollos, teaching him **the way of God more accurately** (Acts 18:26).

But this ministry doesn't mean they held an authoritative role, such as an elder or minister.

4. Equality and differentiation of roles

The exclusion of women from the roles of elder and minister does not mean women are not equal to men. As image-bearers of God and coheirs of salvation, men and women are called to be coworkers in the kingdom of Christ. But the complementary roles of men and women within the church reflects the will of God, expressed first in creation and affirmed in the new creation of the body of Christ.

The complementary roles for men and women predates the fall into sin.

The entrance of sin in the world disrupted the original harmony between male + female.

But the presence of sin is not the ultimate reason for men and women having different roles in God's kingdom.

The disruptive and splintering effects of sin on the relationship of male and female are not reversed by the removal of role differences, but rather by a renewed attitude of mutual love and submission, first in the home (Ephesians. 5:22-33) and also in the church (I Corinthians 11:3-16).

Differentiation between roles of men and women ought not be interpreted as a matter of inequality between male and female. The relationship between God the Father and his Son Jesus provides a perfect example of submission without any inequality. Jesus submitted and obeyed God his Father in everything.

Jesus also showed submission and obedience to his human parents: Luke 2:51.

In the same way, proper headship and submission in the church does not mean a difference of value between people.

5. Summary and conclusions

Although male and female were equally created in God's image, male headship was established by the man being the one from whom and for whom woman was created, a truth immediately applied in marriage (Genesis 2). Although sin has corrupted God's perfect creation (Genesis 3), throughout the Old Testament male headship is exhibited in positions of primary leadership among God's people: such as prophet, priest, and king. The few exceptions only prove the rule.

In the New Testament that pattern continues with male headship in marriage. And male headship appears in the church. Jesus appointed only male apostles; Paul appointed only male elders. And there are three passages which restrict the role of women in the church: I Corinthians 11:2-16, I Corinthians 14:33b-36; I Timothy 2:9-15. Certainly leadership roles for women are expanded under the new covenant, but evidence is not sufficient to overturn the principle of male headship.

Furthermore, from New Testament times until recently, it has been the consistent Christian teaching that the three key texts prohibit Christian women from serving in primary leadership roles. Even though women are seen to have important gifts for service in the church, they are to be excluded from roles that involve governing authority. Sadly, the church down through the centuries has not always adequately stressed the equality of male and female. Nevertheless, the church has consistently seen that Christian women do participate fully in salvation and life in Christ even though they are excluded from certain leadership roles in the church. Thus the most obvious teaching of Scripture for today is that only qualified male members of the church should serve in the offices of elder and minister.

The Inclusive Conviction: men and women may serve as elders and pastors

1. Old Testament passages

1.1 **Genesis 1: especially 26-27**

Genesis 1:26-27 affirms that both male and female were equally created in the image of God. It says nothing about defining their relationship. It does indicate that they mutually reflect God's image and fulfill the creation mandate.

1.2 **Genesis 2: especially 20-24**

The creation account in Genesis 2 complements the account in Genesis 1. The male has a certain priority in that Adam was created before Eve (vs. 21-22). However, the woman is created as a *helper suitable* for man (vs. 18). From other Old Testament uses of the word *helper*, it most often means a *companion*, which primarily reflects equality. Adam gave the *woman* her name (vs. 23). This is immediately linked with marriage. Vs. 24: **For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.** This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament (Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:6; Ephesians 5:31) to show the intimate union between husband and wife. Genesis 2 does not specify any headship. And the context includes marriage.

1.3 **Genesis 3: especially 16-20**

Genesis 3 recounts the story of the fall. Because of human sin a curse falls on the serpent, the ground, the woman, and the man. The pronouncement upon the woman is not only that there will be an increase of pain in bearing children, but also that her husband *will rule over you* (vs. 16). The context of a curse suggests this rule will be domineering and oppressive. Man's responsibility to take care of the garden (Genesis 2) is continued; but after the fall the land is cursed, and he will toil with pain and sweat (Genesis. 3:17-19). In short, after the fall into sin the leadership or rule of men becomes distorted by sin and is oppressive. That certainly is confirmed in human history.

1.4 The rest of the Old Testament

1) It is plain that throughout the Old Testament males are the most prominent. Men are in charge, filling the prominent leadership roles. In Israel the roles of prophet, judge, king, and priest were all exercised by men.

Yet the exceptions are significant. Hannah speaks prophetically in her prayer/song (I Samuel 2:1-10), pointing to a new era in Israel under a king. Her song is echoed in the *Magnificat*, the song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) and in the *Benedictus*, the song of Zechariah (Luke 1:67-79). Miriam serving as a prophetess (Exodus 15:20-21), Deborah as a prophetess and judge (Judges 4:4-10), and Huldah as a prophetess (II Kings 22:14-20; II Chronicles 34:22-28) show that general male leadership cannot be an exclusive God-ordained pattern. After all, when these exceptions occur, the Bible offers no apologies for the leadership provided by these women; rather we find only a natural and willing acceptance of their ministry.

2) Aspects of life in the old covenant clearly show the different place of women. Only males received circumcision, the sign of the covenant (Genesis 17:9-14). After giving birth to a girl, a mother was considered ceremonially unclean for twice as long as after giving birth to a boy. And it appears that the right to divorce was given to the husband but not to his wife (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

3) God designed the old covenant- yet certain aspects are temporary: a foreshadowing of the covenant in Christ. From the Old Testament prophets we repeatedly hear that God is going to do a *new* thing for his people that will transcend what he has done in the past. In Jeremiah 31:31-34 God proclaims that he will make a new covenant with the house of Israel that will not be like the covenant that he made when he brought them out of Egypt. Speaking through Joel, God states that in that new day he will pour out his Spirit equally upon men and women, upon sons + daughters, so that both will prophesy (Joel 2:28-32). Ezekiel (11:19-20; 36:26-27) speaks of a time when God will make his people more obedient to him by giving them *hearts of flesh* rather than *hearts of stone*.

That new day will be more inclusive, bringing salvation to gentiles as well as Jews (Isaiah 49:6). God's redemption will include eunuchs and foreigners (Isaiah 56:1-8), who under the law had been excluded (Leviticus 21:17-23; Deuteronomy 23:1-9). These prophecies are fulfilled when the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed. In that day both men and women equally receive the sign of the new covenant.

2. New Testament evidence: seven passages or themes

2.1 Male leadership in marriage is clearly continued under the new covenant.

The husband is called **the head of the wife (Ephesians 5:23)**. In many letters the wife is instructed to *submit* to her husband (Ephesians 5:22, 24; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1).

But the main issue is whether the male leadership among God's people in the old covenant continued among God's people in the New Testament. True, Jesus chose only male apostles. Paul appointed only males as elder (Acts 14:23; I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). But is this expected to continue? Does it fulfill the vision of the new covenant with the new status and role of women? This does not seem to be the case.

2.2 Galatians 3:28:

Galatians 3 picks up themes from the blessings promised by the prophets. Galatians is among the earliest writings of the New Testament. Galatians 3 contrasts the life in Christ with the previous life *under the law*. Galatians 3:26-29 may be translated: **So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**

Everyone agrees that this text declares that male and female share equally in salvation in Christ. *But there are five reasons to see broader implications in the text.*

1) It is remarkable that Paul includes the pairs slave-free and male-female. These relationships are not discussed elsewhere in the letter, which is primarily about the relationship between Jew and gentile. The fact that Paul includes them *suggests* that this trio of paired opposites was meant to counter the chauvinistic statements found in the Jewish cycle of morning prayers in which the male believer thanked God that he had not been made a gentile, or a slave, or a woman.

2) The grammatical construction of *nor is there male and female* is different from the other two pairs, which read *neither-nor*. This wording deliberately picks up the language of Genesis 1:27: **male and female he created them.** This suggests that in Christ male and female are restored to their original equal participation in the image of God and the call to fulfill the creation mandate.

3) From the first pair, **neither Jew nor Greek**, we see that *oneness in Christ* refers not only to their salvation but to their relationship. In Paul's letter he confronts Peter on his refusal to eat with gentiles in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14). The oneness of Jew and gentile in Christ required equal fellowship while sharing meals. In the same way, sharing table fellowship would apply not only to the Jew-Greek pair but also to slave-free and male-female.

4) Galatians 3:28 does not explicitly speak of the equality of male and female roles; but it does seem to imply it. It seems to pick up the equality of Genesis 1:27. It would be inappropriate to say: *Theophilus may not be an elder because he's Greek*. It would be inappropriate to say: *Onesimus may not be an elder because he's a slave*. So too it is inappropriate to say: *Apphia may not be an elder because she is a woman*.

5) Finally, one of the blessings that all the believers in Galatia received in Christ was their adoption: **So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith**. All the privileges that go with adoption were equally theirs, whether they were Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female. So, women have the same status as men through their adoption in Christ.

2.3 Baptism as the sign and seal of the new covenant

Circumcision, the sign of the old covenant, was administered only to males. No Old Testament prophecy foreshadowed baptizing both male and female one day. There is no New Testament pronouncement that females should also receive God's sign and seal on them. The church simply seemed to know that the great day of renewal, the day of universality and inclusiveness, called for the baptism of male and female. The baptism of females along with males *suggests* a more profound equality than a simple equality of salvation under the old covenant.

2.4 The gifts of the Spirit and the right to exercise those gifts

With the prophecy of Joel 2:28 and its fulfillment in these last days (Acts 2:17-18), Paul often refers to Christians receiving the gifts of the Spirit (Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 12:7-11; 27-30; Ephesians 4:7-13). These gifts include leadership roles, such as those necessary for apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Further, these gifts seem to be given to all believers, whether male or female.

In Paul's letters these gifts are never limited to men. For example:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good (I Corinthians 12:7,27; see also Romans 12:3; Ephesians 5:7).

In addition, along with the gift there goes the right and duty to exercise that gift.

If women with leadership gifts are to fully use their gifts,

they should have the opportunity to serve in every arena, including elder and minister.

2.5 Women and men as prophets, priests, and kings in the new covenant

1) *Prophets*: As Joel 2:28 promised, both men and women received the Spirit to enable them to prophesy (Acts 2:17-18).

Women as well as men prophesied in Corinth (I Corinthians 11:5).

The daughters of Philip had the gift of prophecy (Acts 21:9).

2) *Priests and Kings*: Unlike women in the old covenant, in the new covenant women as well as men function as priests and kings. God promised that if Israel obeyed his covenant, she would become **a kingdom of priests + a holy nation** (Exodus 19:5-7). In the New Testament this promise is applied to the church, sometimes emphasizing the priestly aspect (I Peter 2:4-5), sometimes emphasizing the kingly aspect (Rev. 5:10). Thus women share equally with men in all roles as believers: prophet, priest and king.

2.6 Women as witnesses and agents of special revelation in the new covenant

The prophetic utterances of Mary and Elizabeth are recorded in Luke 1:39-56; through them God continues to instruct the church. The Samaritan woman at the well led many to believe in him as a result of her testimony (John 4:7-42).

Women were the first to see the risen Christ + witness to his resurrection (Matt. 28:1-10).

2.7 Women as fellow workers in Christ for the gospel

In the new covenant women carry out many key leadership roles in the church.

Romans 16:1-2 refers to Phoebe as **a deacon in the church Cenchreae**.

Priscilla and Aquila are called **my fellow workers in Christ Jesus** (Romans 16:3).

They also instructed the mighty Apollos more fully in the gospel (Acts 18:24-26).

Paul noted **Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord**.

These examples are important because Paul also uses these very words to describe those with a church leadership role (I Thessalonians 5:12)- including preaching and teaching (I Timothy 5:17). Even more telling, Paul refers to Andronicus and Junia as **outstanding among the apostles**. So it's almost certain that Junia, a female, served among the apostles of the early church.

Apphia, with Archippus, was a leader in the church at Philemon's house (Philemon 2). Euodia + Syntyche (Phil. 4:2) were *fellow workers*, who labored *side by side* with Paul.

These specific cases support the view that Galatians 3:28 and its implications powerfully influenced the church- to involve women in essential leadership roles.

3 Three passages which seem to disagree with the inclusive conviction

The case for opening the offices of elder and minister to qualified women rests upon the overall sweep of the Bible's teachings. Some think there are passages—three in particular— which override this conviction. But rightly interpreted, these passages can be properly understood in harmony with the inclusive conviction.

3.1 I Corinthians 11:2-16:

In Corinth female believers were exercising new-found freedom in Christ and were participating in the worship service by praying and prophesying. Paul never discouraged the women from praying and prophesying. He simply insisted that they show proper decorum, by wearing long hair and an appropriate head covering. To support his concern, he states in verse 3: **I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man + the head of Christ is God.**

How is the term *head* (*kephalê*) used here?³ There are two reasons to conclude that here Paul is using *head* to mean *source- not authority over*. First, in general Greek usage the term *head* (*kephalê*) used as a metaphor didn't mean *have authority over*. Only later in Ephesians and Colossians did Paul use it that way in regard to Christ. The Corinthians likely would have understood *kephalê* as *source*. Second, Paul later elaborates on the male-female relationship (I Corinthians 11:8-9). There he states: **for man did not come from woman but woman from man.** Clearly this involves the idea of man being a source. In this context, head (*kephalê*) probably has the same meaning- being a source or provider- as earlier in verse 3.

It is conceded that in this text Paul is speaking to more than married people. While affirming their equality, he does insist that women have their heads covered while praying and prophesying, because of man being the source of woman (vs. 3, 8-9), because of the angels (vs. 10), because of what *nature itself* teaches (vs.14), and because of the widespread practices in the churches at that time (vs. 16).

However, the church over time has judged that the wearing of head coverings by women is an application of a principle rather than the principle itself. So the church has not usually required women in other cultures to cover their heads. In fact, this passage clearly permits a woman to pray and prophesy in a worship service as long as she does so with proper decorum. Overall, this passage supports rather than opposes what the Bible as a whole teaches: that men and women share equally not only in salvation in Christ but also in proclaiming the gospel.

3.2 I Corinthians 14:33b-35

The context of I Corinthians 14:33b-35 (see vs. 26-33a) involves proper decorum during worship gatherings of those who speak in tongues and those who prophesy. Participants- including prophets- must know when to keep silent (vs. 28-30). Wives should be silent; they are not permitted to speak; they must be in submission. If they wish to inquire about something, they are to ask their own husbands at home, since to do otherwise is disgraceful (I Cor. 14:33b-35).

Two things are to be noted about I Corinthians 14. First, Paul applies his teaching to the marriage relationship, since he says that the women should **ask their own husbands at home**. Second, the call to be silent clearly wasn't meant to be absolute; that would contradict I Corinthians 11. In this context Paul must be referring to silencing disruptive speech that would be inappropriate in the marriage relationship and dishonoring to God. **God is not a God of disorder but of peace.**

To hear the enduring message of this passage, we must distinguish between a principle and the application of a principle. Two principles seem to be at work here. First, male headship in marriage must be honored. Second, in worship everything must be done in an orderly and edifying way. These principles are valid for all times + places. The application of these principles in the rather free-wheeling worship services at Corinth meant wives weren't to speak in a disorderly way. Honoring these principles today means that wives/women may speak and participate in worship as long as they honor headship in marriage and aren't disruptive.

3.3 I Timothy 2:9-15

Four features of I Timothy 2:9-15 should be highlighted. First in the church women should pray and dress modestly and adorn themselves with good deeds rather than external finery (vs. 9-10). Second, women are to learn but must do so in quietness and full submission (vs. 11). Third, Paul does not permit a wife/woman to teach or usurp authority over a husband/man (vs.12). Fourth, Paul bases this restriction on creation and the fall (vs. 13-14).

Timothy was left in Ephesus to combat false teachers (I Timothy 1:3-7). They promoted speculative theories and false ideas about the law, leading many astray. It seems that some of the younger widows (5:13) were spreading this false teaching and some (5:15) had already capitulated to Satan. The misguided teachers seemed to be forbidding marriage and eating certain foods (4:3)- a false legalism. Paul's guidance in I Timothy 2:11-15 can best be understood against this background.

Verse 12: **I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.** This verse is crucial. It raises three disputable issues.⁴

First, is Paul addressing the marriage relationship or the whole church? The word *submission* is the same one used in Ephesians 5:22 + I Corinthians 14:34, where marriage is being discussed. And since I Timothy 2:15 refers to women being saved through childbearing, Paul seems to have the marriage relationship in mind.

Second, in vs. 12 what does the word *authentein- to have authority over* mean? It seems likely that here it has the negative sense of *to usurp authority over*. This was the King James translation. In support of this view Paul uses a different word in I Corinthians 7:4 when he affirms that a wife has proper authority over the body of her husband and the husband has proper authority over the body of his wife. Given the context of teaching in I Timothy 2:12, what is likely prohibited is the exercise of a sinful, usurping domineering authority within marriage.

Paul's commands in I Timothy 2:11-12 are rooted first in the creation story: Adam was formed first, then Eve (vs. 13). This affirmation is best understood as countering the false teachers who were forbidding marriage and eating certain foods- not recognizing the goodness of creation (I Timothy 4:1-5).

Third, I Timothy 2:14-15 is notoriously difficult to interpret: **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.** These verses suggest that the entire passage has in mind a very specific problem in Ephesus, specifically, the one pictured in I Timothy 5:11-15.

Gordon Fee (*Gospel and Spirit*, pp. 57-59) interprets verses 14 and 15 this way: *Based on words of Eve in Genesis 3:13- **the serpent deceived me, and I ate-** Paul states that Adam was not deceived- by the snake- but rather it was the woman (note the change from Eve to the woman), who having been deceived (by Satan is implied) fell into transgression. That is exactly the point of I Timothy 5:15- such deception of the woman by Satan has been repeated in the Ephesian church. But in 2:15 Paul says there is still hope she can be saved (eschatological salvation is ultimately in view, but in the context she shall be saved or protected from deception by Satan), provided she is first of all a woman of faith, love, and holiness.*

⁴ For a description of these points, see footnote 2.

In summary, Paul in I Timothy 2:11-15 is seeking to preserve the integrity of marriage by forbidding women to teach their husbands in a domineering way. The reason for Paul's commands can best be seen over against the false teachings that were troubling the church at Ephesus. Paul is spelling out the application of the principle of male headship in marriage because of the inappropriate behavior of some women in the Ephesian church. Paul's injunction against teaching done in a domineering way is similar to his insistence in 1 Corinthians 11 on head coverings for women when they are praying and prophesying. Such a reading of what Paul teaches here regarding marriage and piety suggests that if women teach and exercise the authority of leadership without domineering, then there is no objection to their using these gifts to build up the church.

4. Summary and conclusions

Male and female were equally created in God's image: Genesis 1.
 Male priority in marriage was established with Adam and Eve: Genesis 2.
 Sin corrupted what was originally intended, with dire consequences: Genesis 3.
 In the Old Testament, leadership among God's people was predominantly male.
 Some features of the old covenant reflect the diminished status of the female.
 Through the prophets, God promised a coming day of renewal when he would make a new covenant that would transcend the old covenant and its practices.

In the new covenant the equality of male and female was restored (Galatians 3:28). To be sure, male priority in marriage as depicted in Genesis 2 continues, but it is now infused with the sacrificial love of Christ (Ephesians 5). The renewed status of women led to church leadership roles far beyond the old covenant. For reasons of decorum and to protect the marriage relationship, Paul restricted the activities (I Corinthians 11) and role of married women (I Corinthians 14; I Timothy 2). But this teaching does not overturn the general analogy of Scripture that all the rights and privileges of the office of believer belong to women as well as to men.

Throughout the history of the church some of these passages- especially I Timothy 2- have been understood as prohibiting women from voting in government elections, prohibiting women from voting in congregational meetings, prohibiting women from serving in church leadership, and prohibiting women from serving as an elder or minister. Over time God's Spirit has helped the church deepen its understanding of God's Word. The church has seen that women have freedom in Christ in these areas. The oneness and equality of male and female are more basic than the temporary regulations regarding the functions of wives/women. Ultimately the weight of scriptural teaching is that both qualified male and female members may serve in the role of elder and minister.

