

# Exegetical and Theological Foundations for MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IN MINISTRY

## INTRODUCTION

The document contains the exegetical and theological foundations for the summary paper. Due to space, a thorough treatment of every biblical passage on this subject cannot be included. The biblical passages that most frequently appear in discussions on the role of men and women in ministry in the church have been included here.

## GENESIS 1

This is the macro account (big picture) of God's creation. God created mankind (male and female) in his *own image and likeness* (Gen 1:26-27) with the dual role of *representing* him and *reflecting* his glory<sup>1</sup>.

The three-part statement about mankind can be summarised as: (v27a) *God created mankind in his own image* – we come from God; (v27b) *In the image of God he created them* – we bear resemblance to God; (v27c) *Male and female he created them* – we are male and female<sup>2</sup>. Both male and female are created in God's image and likeness and both are blessed and commissioned to multiply and rule creation together for his glory<sup>3</sup> (1:28). No other creature is given such glory and honour (Ps 8:5).

Some scholars interpret the image of God as the collective of man and woman together rather than as man and woman as individuals. Aida Spencer holds this view and says: "*Male and female are together needed to reflect God's image.*"<sup>4</sup> And then, "*There is no possibility, according to [Gen 1:26-27], that Adam, the male, could by himself reflect the*

*nature of God. Neither is it possible for Adam, the female, by herself to reflect God's nature. Male and female are needed to reflect God's nature.*" This collective view of the image of God is then applied to church leadership. "*Females as well as males are needed in positions of authority in the church to help people better comprehend God's nature. God's image needs male and female to reflect God more fully.*"

We believe Genesis 1 is not teaching that the image of God resides in the collective but that every individual bears the image of God, male and female equally, for the following reasons: First, the divine image residing in Adam (and Eve) was passed on to his son Seth, an individual. "*When God created mankind, he made them in the likeness of God... when Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image.*" (Gen 5:1-3) Second, Scripture teaches that each and every individual is an image bearer (Gen 9:5-6; Jam 3:9). Third, every Christian man and woman is individually being created into Christ's image – "*For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son*" (Rom 8:29). And fourth, Jesus, as an individual (and single male), perfectly imaged God without a female counterpart – "*the Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*" (Heb 1:3).

C.S. Lewis captures the dignity and worth of every individual when he says: "*There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal.*"<sup>5</sup> In summary, mankind was created as royalty in God's world, male and female alike bearing the divine glory equally.

<sup>1</sup> Antony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* – "although these two words are used generally as synonyms, we may recognize a slight difference between the two... together tell us that man is a representation of God who is like God in certain aspects."

<sup>2</sup> Ray Ortlund Jr, *Male-Female Equality and Male Headship (Genesis 1-3)*, www.bible.org. Adapted.

<sup>3</sup> This is often called the *creation* or *cultural mandate*.

<sup>4</sup> Aida B. Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis – *The Weight of Glory*

## GENESIS 2

This is the micro account (specific details) of how God created men and women. We must keep in mind that (Gen 1 and 2) are different accounts of the same creation event so both must be held together.

Some commentators flatten out gender differences to matters of mere plumbing: “I propose, then, a paradigm of gender that does, indeed, draw no lines between men and women as to role in home, church, or society—beyond those required by biology.”<sup>6</sup> While others assert there are no authority or leadership roles<sup>7</sup>, or headship<sup>8</sup> in Genesis 2 except those that come from the Fall as curses (Gen 3:16). Others pit Genesis 1 against Genesis 2, believing Genesis 1 overrides Genesis 2. However, we believe that while Genesis 1 teaches the equality of men and women, Genesis 2 teaches that men and women were created by God to be meaningfully different and complementary to each other and that these two truths are not competing. This can be seen in several mutually reinforcing ways.

*First, the significance of the creational order in Genesis 2 is highlighted insistently and explicitly.* Intertextual support for this is found in the NT where Paul recognises this order – “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim 2:13a) and spiritual headship – “For man did not come from woman, but woman from man” (1 Cor 11:8). The Apostle Paul’s point on both occasions is not merely chronological. Rather, the more important point is functional.<sup>9</sup> God created man and woman at different times and in different ways to show that while both are image bearers, they also have complementary differences.

*Second, this creation order is reflected in Adam’s duty to lead the two-equal image-bearers.* For example, Adam receives a mission and a command before Eve is created. God forms the man (2:5) and places him in the garden to *work it* (2:8b) and *take care of*

*it* (2:15) so that it will flourish and fill the entire earth for God’s glory. God also gives the man the command to “*not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” (2:15-17). While the creational mandate is clearly given to both the man and the woman (Gen 1:28), it will be Adam’s duty to lead the relationship of the two equal image-bearers.

Similarly, Adam names the woman, suggesting a leadership role in their relationship. Likewise, Adam classified and named all the animals (2:19-20). But “*for Adam no suitable helper was found*” so God created Eve. The parallel between (2:19) “[God] brought [the animals] to the man to see what he would name them” and (2:22) “God brought her to the man” shows Adam exercising a leadership role both in creation and the relationship. The text is not for one moment suggesting Eve was even remotely comparable to the animals. Exactly the opposite happens because Adam immediately recognises that this beautiful creature standing before him is unlike any of the animals. She is “*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*” (2:23), an image-bearer just like him.

*Third, God created the woman to have a helping role.* Genesis 2:18 says: “*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.*” Once again, the NT emphasises this deliberate point: “*neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*” (1 Cor 11: 9). Because the word *alone* (2:18) is often misunderstood to mean *lonely*, sadly many have implied that a woman’s helper purpose is to please and pamper her husband for personal validation. God forbid that any husband should view their wife in such an entitled way!

Conversely, Scripture teaches the very opposite. God’s ideal helper is not a personal slave but a fellow image-bearer who will partner with the man in this work to fulfil the mission of God for the glory of God. This is why the New

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<sup>6</sup> John G. Jr Stackhouse, *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender*

<sup>7</sup> “There is neither explicit nor implicit mention of any authority or leadership role of the man over the women, except as the sad result of their sin in the fall and their ensuing judgements. Even then, 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” – Richard S. Hess, *Equality with and Without Innocence: Genesis*

*1-3 in Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*

<sup>8</sup> “What I do not find in Gen 1-2, however, is anything about ‘headship’, which in English refers to an authority structure...” – Philip B. Payne, *Does Romans 5 Teach Adam’s Federal Headship Implying the Authority of A Husband Over His Wife?*

<sup>9</sup> Scott McKnight, *The Pastoral Epistles* [NIGTC]

Testament commands husbands to treat their wives with respect as “*joint-heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers*” (1 Pet 3:7). Likewise, husbands are called to love their wives the way Christ loves the church (Eph 5:25).

God’s solution is to create another *image-bearer* who is a *suitable or corresponding helper*. Much has been said about the title *helper* because it has often been perceived as demeaning. But again, this seems to miss the point. It conveys the idea of one who comes to the aid of someone else who has the primary responsibility of the activity in question. *Helper* does not imply inferiority because in specific cases it may refer to someone who is in a superior position coming to the aid of someone in an inferior position (e.g. God as our helper Ex 18:4; Dt. 33:29; Ps. 33:10; 33:20; Isa. 41:10 or a parent that helps their child). Some suggest that *ēzer* (helper) always refers to someone superior but that pushes the point too far.<sup>10</sup>

There are three further clues in the text that help to understand what is meant by the term *helper*. First, the proceeding verses tell us that the man was placed by God “*in the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it*” (2:15) and to keep the command “*to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” (2:16). Clearly then, Eve’s role is to help the male-female partnership to fulfil the mission and keep the command. While one vital part of her role was to bear and raise children, it is by no means limited to that<sup>11</sup>. Second, when God brings this helper to Adam, there is a joyful and emotional connection (2:18) that indicates the man has found in the woman an emotional companionship that has been lacking to this point. Third, the word “*suitable*” in (2:20) suggests compatibility – she is a helper comparable to him.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Creation Order – Hierarchical or Egalitarian?* by Jan A. Sigvarten. Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 23-26. Scanzoni and Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be*, 26-27; Gilbert Bilezekian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman’s Place in Church and Family*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 28, 217 n. 9

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this has sometimes been taught. Thomas Aquinas argued that the woman was created “*not indeed to help him in any other work, as some have maintained, because where*

*Fourth, the complementary differences are clearly not a cause for strife but for good, the glory of God, and unity* (2:24). Adam recognises the similarities he shares with Eve “[she is] *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*” (v. 23) in deep contrast to the differences he has experienced with the animals – “*but for Adam no suitable helper was found*” (2v24). But Adam also notices Eve is different to him because she is *female*, not *male* (v23b). These differences are never a matter of better or worse, neither are they merely in their ‘plumbing’ but in every aspect of their personhood. Genesis 2 finishes with absolute joy and total unity. Just as the heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 8:1), so too does his wisdom in the divine design of men and women. The narrative finishes with the man and woman being completely naked and there is a shameless intimacy in all they share.

In conclusion, it should briefly be noted that attempts are made to argue that the creation order is meaningless because *Adam* was a sexually “*undifferentiated and androgynous person*”<sup>12</sup> (i.e. Adam was both male and female) before the female was extracted<sup>13</sup> at the creation of Eve in Gen 2:21-22. We are very unconvinced of this interpretation.

### GENESIS 3

This chapter shows how sin came into God’s good world. Among other things, it also shows the impact that sin has on the relationship between men and women and God’s creational order.

Notably, in Genesis 2-3 God’s command “*not [to] eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” (Gen 2:16-17) appears five times (Gen 2:16-17; 3:1; 3:2; 3:11; 3:17) tying these two chapters into a single narrative. Yet in Genesis 2 the serpent approaches Eve, not Adam. There is no suggestion whatsoever in the Bible that Eve was

*most work is concerned man can get help more conveniently from another man than from a woman; but to help him in the work of procreation.*” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 13: *Man Made to God’s Image*

<sup>12</sup> Junia Project – Quick Start Guide. Groothuis and Payne are also sympathetic to this idea.

<sup>13</sup> *Women in Ministry, A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership*, Fuller Theological Seminary, Thus, God differentiates man (*adam*) into man (*ish*) and woman (*ishshah*), persons of separate male and female gender identity.

intellectually or morally inferior. Sadly, this has been taught at points throughout church history.<sup>14</sup> However, as God's adversary, Satan craftily (3:1) came to lead the male-female partnership astray (cf. Rev 12:9) by approaching the women.

Put simply, the creational order and authority structure established by God in Genesis 1-2 [**God→Adam + Eve→animals**] is reversed [**animal→Eve+Adam→God**] (Gen 3:1-6). In contrast, the order of God's approach when responding to the sin is significant. He comes first to Adam and then Eve (Gen 3:9-13).

The author of Genesis goes to great lengths to show that both Adam and Eve failed to live out the complementary roles God had given them. Eve failed because she did not *help* Adam to keep the command. Adam failed because he did not *lead* the partnership towards God in keeping the command but was passive. Further, Adam did not speak up and protect his wife, allowing her to be deceived.

While some argue that complementary roles are only the product of the curse, we believe that Genesis 3, read in light of chapters 1 & 2, show that they were established in the creation and disrupted and distorted by the Fall. The consequences of this distortion results in a devastating picture of hostility and enmity (Gen 3:14-19).

Together then, we can confidently conclude that Genesis 1-3 teaches that complementary gender roles are part of God's good design from the very beginning, but that in the Fall they were horribly distorted. Furthermore, this creational order sign posts that the goal of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus is not to undo the creational order, but rather to undo the picture of hostility and enmity.

## THE TRINITY

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<sup>14</sup> We reject what Tertullian, the father of Latin Christianity, says: "And do you not know that you are Eve? God's sentence hangs still over all your sex and His punishment weighs down upon you. You are the devil's gateway; you are she who first violated the forbidden tree and broke the law of God. It was you who coaxed your way around him whom the devil had not the force

It is at this point useful to note that in our culture, we easily equate order with significance. However, this clearly is not God's perspective. We've seen this in God's creational order. But we must also observe that order is evident in the Godhead.

God reveals himself in complementarian ways as *father-son* and not as *brother-brother*. Each person of the Trinity, equal in essence and deity, complements the other with unique and complementary roles. The Father sends the Son (1 Jn 4:14), the Son submits to the Father (Jn 6:38), and the Holy Spirit exalts the work and worth of Christ (Jn 16:14) – diverse roles but equality of being and value.

This is who God is: perfect, eternally overflowing with joy, and love and service. This order evident in the Godhead should challenge our easily accepted cultural assumptions that order infers significance.

## WOMEN IN THE OT

The OT records woman serving in important leadership roles among God's people. While many roles were open to women, not all were. Some argue that because women had key leadership roles in both Testaments that all roles must be open but they fail to answer the question why some were not<sup>15</sup>.

One spiritual leadership role clearly reserved for men in the OT was the priesthood. However, the priesthood was not open to all men. Only Aaron and his direct male descendants could occupy this office (Ex 28; Lev 9). There were additional requirements that could disqualify a Levite male from serving (Num 8:24-25).

The reason for the restriction of the priesthood to males is a matter of dispute. Some argue that the OT was merely accommodating itself to the patriarchal culture of the day. We believe this argument does not make sense for the following reasons: First, several other ancient Near

*to attack. With what ease you shattered that image of God: Man! Because of the death you merited, even the Son of God had to die... Woman, you are the gate to hell."*

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca M. Groothuis, *Good News for Women – A Biblical Picture of Gender and Equality*, ch8.

Eastern societies did have priestesses. Second, it makes no sense that the LORD who rescued his people from Pharaoh with such a *strong arm* (Ex 3:19-20) and then gave them the law that reflected his character and glory (Rom 3:23) would capitulate on this simple matter. We believe a much more consistent explanation is that God was mirroring spiritual headship established in creation by reserving this spiritual role to men.

Put simply, we see a pattern of male headship that is established in the old covenant community which is continued in the new covenant community. Jesus, who was never afraid to challenge the culture and who had women on his ministry team, chose 12 men, not 6 men and 6 women. This does not mean that women are not important to God or his work in the world!

Conversely, in the Old Testament women appear in many significant roles. For example, women appear in the OT as prophets. The most prominent were Miriam (Ex 15:20-21) and Huldah (1 King 22:14; 2 Chron 34:22) but there were also unfaithful prophetesses such as Noadiah who caused much grief to God's people (Neh 6:14; Ezek 13:17-24). While prophecy is treated more fully later on, it's important to see that in the NT it is distinct to the gift of teaching (Eph 4:11) and that while teaching in the gathered church appears to be restricted to men, the prophetic gift was most definitely open to all in the church (Acts 21:8-9; 1 Cor 11:5). Bloomberg says about prophets and their NT counterparts: "*The prophets did not seem to perform regular, predictable, leadership functions during worship services or in the day-in, day-out administration of tabernacles, temple, or synagogue. So it would seem inappropriate to liken them to Christian pastors or elders.*"<sup>16</sup>

One important case in the OT is Deborah, also a prophetess and the only woman to serve as a judge (Judg 4). Judges were civil leaders and possible precursors to the kings. Barak was unwilling to go into battle without Deborah and as a consequence, Deborah rebuked Barak telling him he would suffer shame because a

woman would kill the opposing general rather than accomplishing that feat himself (Judg 4:8-9).

Several other notable mentions should be included. Miriam led the women of Israel in worship (Ex 15:20) and is included in the list of leaders of Israel (Mic 6:4). She also attempted to grab a greater leadership role for herself that ended badly (Num 12:1-5). All the women in the genealogy of Jesus were noted for their fierce and courageous faith. Neither should Sarah, Rebecca, Rahab, Ruth, Abigail, Queen Esther and many other strong women of God be forgotten. There is simply not enough time to commend them all (Heb 11:32).

Several other important points should be highlighted: the OT commands children to obey both father and mother indicating that both men and women have spiritual authority and a leadership role over their children (Ex 20:12; Prov 1:8). The godly woman of Proverbs 31 smashes the traditional stereotype that a woman should remain in the home – she was highly capable, influential and industrious, both inside and outside the home. Scripture highly commends the role of mothers. And in OT law, women were able to inherit property in the absence of legal male heirs (Num 27:1-11).

In conclusion, women featured prominently in the OT. The OT highlights their fierce faith and courageous actions. Many held prophetic roles which continue in the NT. Deborah had a leading civil role. The office of priest and its functions was restricted to qualified men.

## **WOMEN IN THE NT**

Jesus honoured women in ways that were profoundly counter cultural in that era, even surprising his own disciples (John 4:27). Throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus preached to women (John 4:26), welcomed women among his disciples (Luke 10:39), commended women for their faith (Matt 15:28; Luke 7:44-50), defended women from false accusations (Matt 26:6-13), but was also not afraid to rebuke women when necessary (Luke 10:41-42). Women helped to spread the good

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<sup>16</sup> Craig Bloomberg, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*

news of Jesus (John 4:28-29) and even accompanied Jesus and the twelve disciples on their travels<sup>17</sup> (Luke 8:1-3). Women were present at the cross (Luke 23:27) and most importantly, God chose women to be the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:9-10).

In the early church, women joined the disciples in prayer as they waited for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14). Both men and women received the promised Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29) and prophesied and witnessed on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). The book of Acts records the conversions of prominent women (Acts 16:12-15; 17:4, 12, 34), commends some for their faith (Acts 9:36; 18:26), and highlights the giftedness of others such as Priscilla's teaching role (Acts 18:26) and Philip's daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9).

In the epistles, Paul greets many women warmly by name, highlighting how hard they worked in the Lord (Rom 16:1-2, 6, 12; Phil 4:2-3). As in Jesus' ministry, patterns of partnerships had formed in the early church where women often worked with or assisted the Apostles in spiritual matters. The biblical example is of men and women serving together in the church for the glory of God.

### **GALATIANS 3:28**

Some cite this verse as a "manifesto" that removes all distinctions between men and women in ministry. They argue this verse proves the Apostle Paul could not have placed any timeless restrictions on women leading in the church or home and that all other passages that teach otherwise must be misinterpreted<sup>18</sup>. Some go to the extreme of saying Paul could not have written 1 Timothy.

The key issue Paul addresses in Galatians is: how exactly is a person saved? Or, asked differently, what exactly is the gospel? Is

salvation by faith in Jesus alone or is it by faith in Jesus and keeping the law, namely circumcision, to which Paul says: "*if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all*" (Gal 5:2,6).

The context of Galatians 3:28 is not about specific church ministry roles or leadership in the church but about equal standing before God. "*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith*" (3:26), all are baptised into Christ (3:27), all are clothed with Christ, all are Abraham's children (3:29) and all are heirs to Abraham's promises (3:29).

NT Wright who holds an egalitarian position says: "*The first thing to say is fairly obvious but needs saying anyway. Galatians 3 is not about ministry. Nor is it the only word Paul says about being male and female, and instead of taking texts in a vacuum and then arranging them in a hierarchy, for instance by quoting this verse and then saying that it trumps every other verse in a kind of fight to be the senior bull in the herd (what a very masculine way of approaching exegesis, by the way!), we need to do justice to what Paul is actually saying at this point. I am surprised to see, in some of your literature, the insistence that women and men are equally saved and justified; that is, I'm surprised because I've never heard anyone denying it. Of course, there may well be some who do, but I just haven't met them. The point Paul is making overall in this passage is that God has one family, not two, and that this family consists of all those who believe in Jesus; that this is the family God promised to Abraham, and that nothing in the Torah can stand in the way of this unity which is now revealed through the faithfulness of the Messiah. This is not at all about how we relate to one another within this single family; it is about the fact, as we often say, that the ground is even at the foot of the cross.*"<sup>19</sup>

Gordan Fee, also says in his commentary on Galatians: "*...more needs to be said about the 'equalizing' force of v.28, since at this point it has little or nothing to do with any 'role' people play in the*

<sup>17</sup> Beyond financial support, it is unclear exactly what their role was.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Bearden, *On Whether 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Allows an Egalitarian Exegesis* "Before coming to the body of the text (i.e. 1 Cor. 11:2-6) I make two arguments from authority. First, I note that Galatians 3:27-28 serves to remind us that in Christ distinctions based on gender are irrelevant. The second is a reminder of the evangelical

commitment to the infallibility of Scripture. I take Galatians 3:28 as *the starting point for all interpretations of passages pertaining to men and women's relationship*" (*italics ours*).

<sup>19</sup> Dr N. T. Wright, *Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis*, a conference paper for the Symposium, 'Men, Women and the Church' St John's College, Durham, September 4, 2004.

*Christian community except the 'role' they all have in common in God's story as believers in Christ."*<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, we dare not ignore the radical oneness and social ramifications the gospel brings to God's people. The context of v28 is baptism, the outward sign of the new covenant. The gospel brings powerful social reforms and a unique oneness and freedom that breaks down social barriers and walls. That freedom should exist in all areas of church life except in those unique situations where God gives specific restrictions.

We do not believe Gal 3:28 trumps every other text or erases role distinctions in creation or other NT passages because: "*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness*" (2 Tim 3:6). We believe Gal 3:28 must be read in conjunction with the rest of Scripture<sup>21</sup> just like Genesis 1 and 2 must be held in balance. We believe freedom should exist in all areas of church life where God does not give specific restrictions.

## **1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-16**

Before looking at ch. 11 it's helpful to understand the purpose of the letter and its overall structure. The Corinthian church was not in good shape. There were all manner of problems and controversies going on (e.g. internal factions, lawsuits, sexual immorality, pagan idolatry etc.). Paul had received a troubling report from Chloe's household (1:11) and a letter from the Corinthians themselves (7:11) requesting instruction and advice. In response, Paul writes his letter seeking to address these issues that are very serious and threatening to destroy the church if not dealt with. It doesn't take long to see that Paul is very concerned (see 1:10, 3:1).

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<sup>20</sup> Gordan D. Fee, *Galatians*

<sup>21</sup> Paul's instructions in 1 Tim 2 are to a young church planter whose task is to set up authority structures for the health of the church.

<sup>22</sup> Paul is using the term *tradition* in a technical sense, as a rabbi who would pass on a block of teaching to his disciple. In Scripture, *tradition* may have negative connotations in the NT (e.g. Col 2:8 "*vain traditions*", or Mark 7:13 "*you nullify the word of God by your traditions*", see also Matt 15:6) or positive, as is the case here. There are other NT passages in which the word is positive (2 Thess

Commentators point out that there is a theme of disunity running through the book that appears in every section. There are quarrels and factions. (1:10-13), arrogant people talking against Paul (4:18), differing opinions about food sacrificed to idols (8:12), abuse in the Lord's supper (11:18), and valuing some spiritual gifts over others (12:21). All these matters are threatening to split the church.

In chapters 11-14 Paul turns his attention to problems and quarrels arising in the public worship (11:16, 20, 33, 14:4, 23):

- Men-women relationships in the church as they pray and prophesy
- Abuses of the Lord's Supper
- Misuses of spiritual gifts (in particular, abuses around the gift of tongues) and the solution of love as a better way
- And intelligibility and order in worship (in particular, speaking in tongues and prophecy).

In 11:2 Paul says: "*I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to traditions just as I passed them on to you.*" Paul praises the Corinthians for *remembering* and *holding* (keep secure) the *traditions*<sup>22</sup> he had passed on to them. One *tradition* Paul passed on<sup>23</sup> to the Corinthians was how men and women relate (11:2-13).

Although this introductory verse begins with praise, Paul's goal is to move the Corinthians towards correction: "*But I want you to realize...*" (11:3). Once again, the Corinthians have gone too far and correction is needed<sup>24</sup>.

Paul reminds them of the principle of headship he has taught them (11:3) he has already taught them, that:

- [a.] *the head of every man is Christ*
- [b.] *the head of every woman is man,*

3:6): "*Keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the traditions [teaching] you received from us.*" Paul, as the disciple-maker, did his job well in Corinth by handing over blocks of teaching for the Corinthians to hold on.

<sup>23</sup> See (1 Cor 11:16) – the teaching of the Lord's Supper – "*for what I received from the Lord I passed on to you.*"

<sup>24</sup> This is similar to (12:1) "*Now about gifts... I don't want you to be uninformed.*" For Paul, it was never good enough simply to enforce practice – people must see the reason why and be convinced by it!

[c.] *the head of Christ is God,*

where the central statement is [b.] because that is the focus of this passage and where [a.] and [c.] are parallel *headship* statements that help qualify and explain what [b.] actually means<sup>25</sup>.

There are two immediate questions that need to be answered. The first is: what is the meaning of the word *head*? The traditional understanding is that it refers to an authoritative position over someone else with a strong emphasis on serving and responsibility (Eph 1:22, 5:22-24; Col 2:10; 2:15). More recently, some have argued that a better understanding is that it does not refer to authority but rather one's source or origin. While a case *could* be made for both meanings in this passage<sup>26</sup>, we believe that authority best fits this passage and the overall biblical evidence. Whatever meaning of the word 'head' is chosen for the male-female relationship has to apply to the Christ-man and God-Christ relationship. The great danger of using *source* as the meaning of head is that when applied to the God-Christ relationship it approaches the Arian heresy<sup>27</sup> that nearly destroyed the early church. However, the *submission* of Christ to the Father's *authority* is consistently taught throughout Scripture (Luke 22:42; John 6:38; 57; 8:28; 1 Cor 3:21-23; 1 Cor 15:27-28).

The second question is whether the passage is talking about male-female or husband-wife relationships. In the original language, there are no separate words for *male-husband* and *woman-wife*. While Eph 5:22-23 uses personal language – “*their own man*” and “*must love his woman*” – making it easy to understand that a husband-

wife relationship is in view, in this passage it is not so easy to determine. It would appear the passage primarily addresses married men and women, but the principles are to be applied to all in public worship.

In 11:4-5 Paul moves to the actual problem: “*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered... But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered...*” While the focal point of this passage seems to be the behaviour of some women<sup>28</sup> in the church, Paul seizes the occasion to clarify proper conduct for men too.

While it is impossible to say exactly what was happening, it would seem that women were praying or prophesying in the church without a veil and/or with their hair free and flowing. Men may also have been doing some unusual things too, such as covering their head as they prayed and prophesied. Whatever the situation, the messages women (and maybe men) were sending out were confusing in their Corinthian context and culture. In fact, they were disgracing God and hindering the spread of the gospel.

Bloomberg<sup>29</sup> gives several possibilities of what this covering/uncovering could signify in first century culture: A.) Male Roman priests covered their heads for idol worship, B.) Long hair amongst Greeks was a sign of homosexuality C.) Short hair among women was a sign of lesbianism, and D.) The lack of a veil or hair free and flowing was a sign of being sexually available or immoral.

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<sup>25</sup> The two surrounding statements [a.] and [c.] are very important. Statement [a.] reminds us the male headship in the man-woman relationship has accountability to Christ, seen very clearly in (1 Pet 3:7) “*Husbands, in the same way be considerate with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.*” Statement [c.] reminds us that the male-woman relationship is of two equals (just as the Father and Son are both God and of the same essence) and that Christ's submission to the Father was voluntary (Isaiah 6:8), not forced.

<sup>26</sup> Language of *authority* is used in (v10) “*It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head*” while language of *source* is used in (v8-9, 12) “*for as woman came from man...*”

<sup>27</sup> The Arian heresy, as taught by Arius, declared that God had physically created (was the *source* of) Christ. The

Nicaean council strongly condemned this teaching. The Nicene Creed states – “*We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages... begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father.*”

<sup>28</sup> While Paul begins speaking to both men and women, it's clear that the passage spends more time speaking to women. Gordon Fee notes that though the man is addressed first (v4) Paul is “*setting up his argument with women by means of a hypothetical situation for the man that would be equally shameful to his relationship to his 'head' as what the women are doing is to theirs.*” Supporting this is also the fact that Paul seems to land on the behavior of women (v13) without mentioning men as he concludes his teaching on this matter.

<sup>29</sup> Craig Bloomberg, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*

Paul says to Corinthian male believers that they must not *cover* their (literal) head because if they do, they will dishonor their *metaphorical* head who is Christ. And Paul says to Corinthians female believers that they must not uncover their (literal) head or else they will dishonor their *metaphorical* heads. The reason is that the church is to be all about the glory of Jesus and not the wrong glory of men nor women.

It's important to observe that if indeed there was a "cultural covering" [i.e. A.) or D.) from the list above] Paul ends up referring to *long hair* vs short hair in (11:13) – an argument from "nature". This reinforces that the passage is not simply about a transient cultural context but of God's creational design<sup>30</sup>.

(11:5-6) Paul continues by saying that a woman who prays and prophesies with her (literal) "head uncovered dishonors her head ... it is the same as having her head shaved." It's important to follow the argument in these two verses. Paul is saying that if women pray or prophesy with their head uncovered they are sending out the same message as if they were to cut (or shave off all) their hair: "for if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved..." (11:6). This can be put into a simple equation: praying with head uncovered = (the same as) having her hair shaved off = (the same as) disgrace in that culture.

Bruce Winters says that during the Roman Empire, "It can be confidently concluded that the veiled head was the symbol of the modesty and chastity expected of a married woman."<sup>31</sup> For any Corinthian woman to cut or shave her hair would certainly have sent out a very brazen and confusing message indeed. It probably signaled sexual availability and unfaithfulness (*hair flowing free*) or lesbianism (*having her hair shaved off*). A woman with shaved hair would be sending out a message saying: *I don't need men. I am independent of them.* This would probably be true in our Australian culture today.

Craig Bloomberg says: "In verses 5b-6, Paul remarks ironically that if women are going to send ambiguous signals about their sexuality or religious

*commitments through inappropriate hairstyles or lack of headdress, then they might as well go all the way and become bald ... and unequivocally send the wrong signals! ... In verses 14-15 "glory" is the opposite of "disgrace" so in both places it probably carries the sense of "honour."* For a Christian man to appear gay or pagan dishonours God; for a woman to appear lesbian or unfaithful dishonours her husband. Obviously husbands also dishonour their wives and wives dishonour God when they act in these inappropriate ways, but if an authority structure is implicit in this passage, Paul's less inclusive wording becomes understandable. One should be particularly concerned not to dishonour one's immediate spiritual head."

Paul is saying that whenever men and women in the church disregarded the culturally relevant gender markers (commonly acknowledged ways of showing propriety in their culture) it brings shame and dishonor. What is an unbeliever to make of this? By letting her hair out or loose she was saying: *I am sexually available.* For a married Christian woman to even appear to say: *I am sexually available* is the same as saying: *I am independent of my husband. I don't need him. I am free from him.* Which is the same as saying: *I have no respect or regard for my spiritual head that God has given me.* And Paul says that such conduct for Christian woman is disgraceful.

Paul then pushes his argument back in reverse. If it is a disgraceful for a woman to send out such a strong message about her sexuality, then Christian women should respect the culturally relevant gender markers (and men should too). In doing so, Christian women (and men) will honor their respective *heads*: Christ and man.

What was causing all of this? It may be possible that Christian women, in their newfound Christian freedom, were going too far and "throwing off all shackles." Paul says: keep your gender markers and be distinctively male and female.

*A man ought not to cover his head since:  
[a.] he is the image and glory of God,  
[b.] but woman is the glory of man  
(11v7).*

<sup>30</sup> (11:8-9) refers to God's creational purposes.

<sup>31</sup> Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives*.

It's important to observe the text closely. First, Paul is once again addressing the cultural practice of *men covering their heads* (11:7) and *women uncovering their heads* (11:10) and will do two more times (11:10,13). Second, the key word that appears in both statements [a.] and [b.] is *glory* not *image*. What the text is not saying is that man alone is created in the *image* of God and woman is not because Gen 1:27 makes it very clear: “*in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*” Rather Paul is talking about *glory* and *dishonor/shame*. Paul has already used the word *dishonor* (11:4-5). *Glory* is the opposite of *dishonor*.

For man did not come from woman  
 but woman from man.  
 Neither was man created for woman  
 But woman for man (11:8-9)

If v7b is included with v8,9 then there is a triplet of reasons why the blurring of sexes should not occur. All three reasons come from God's creational order in which God has established *headship* that is neither cultural nor transient and that ought to be observed and embraced. This triplet of reasons affirm the key statement previously made in 11:3 “*that the head of the woman is man.*” This *creational order* of male-female relationships should be reflected in Christian worship.

*It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.* (11:10) This is a mysterious verse. The expression “*authority over her own head*” could mean wearing a cultural covering (see 11:5). As to the angels, it is not unreasonable to think that angels are present, witnessing and participating in our worship. There is an entire spiritual world we often ignore that includes demons and angels.

Nevertheless, in the Lord  
 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. (11:11-12)

Paul now adds a most important truth and safeguard to headship: *mutual dependence*. If some women were dishonoring their head and sending out conflicting messages of independence, Paul wants to remind all Christian women that Eve came from Adam. And likewise, possibly preempting that men could reach some very unhelpful and demeaning conclusions about their Christian sisters, Paul reminds men that they all have been born of a woman – each of them has a mother!

Therefore, Christian men and women cannot despise each other or operate independently from each other. Men and women are inseparable and interdependent in the Lord. Both men and women owe their existence to the Lord but also to each other, beautifully complementing each other. The argument is rounded off neatly – both depend on each other and *everyone comes from the Lord*.

In 11:13-15 Paul appeals to *nature*. There are ways to dress that are appropriate to our God-given gender, that suit our nature, and other ways that are not. Finally, Paul reminds the Corinthians that what he is teaching is *consistent across all the churches of God* (11:16).

Schreiner writes: “*We must distinguish between the fundamental principle that underlies the text and the application of that principle in a specific culture. The fundamental principle is that the sexes, although equal, are different. God has ordained that men have the responsibility to lead, while women have a complementary and supportive role. More specifically, if women pray or prophesy in church, they should do so under the authority of male headship. Now, in the first century, failure to wear a covering sent a signal to the congregation that a woman was rejecting the authority of male leadership... Today, except in certain religious groups, if a woman fails to wear a head covering while praying or prophesying, no one thinks she is in rebellion... The principle still stands that women should pray and prophesy in a manner that makes it clear that they submit to male leadership.*”<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Thomas Schreiner, “Head Coverings, Prophecies and the Trinity,” in John Piper & Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006), 138.

Therefore, several important lessons come out of this passage: First, all Christian men and women should have appropriate regard for their God-given gender. Men should look and behave like men and women should look and behave like women. The creational principle is that God has made us distinctively male and female and we ought to practice and celebrate this. Christian men and women should never send out confusing messages (even unintentionally) suggesting they are sexually available, independent of each other or so like each other it's impossible to pick the difference. Exactly what that looks like will be different from culture to culture, but the underlying creational principle remains the same. In our western culture, physical head coverings are no longer a cultural indicator of gender and respectability. Rather, women use their attire and hair style to indicate their femininity, and men likewise their masculinity. As Andrew Wilson put it so well and humorously: "*And for men in my world, looking like Bob Marley doesn't mean you're undermining God-given gender distinctives; looking like Eddie Izzard, on the other hand, probably does. So in the church I'm part of, men can pray and prophesy if they're wearing a cap or a hat – but not if they're wearing lipstick or a dress.*"

Second, both sexes must have appropriate regard for their own spiritual head (man-Christ and woman-man). The principle of spiritual headship was given in the creational order. When we don't respect it, one of two things happen: we wrongly shame or wrongly glorify our own head. What Paul wants is for the church to be filled with the right glory, so that Christ is exalted, not man or woman.

Third, unruly behavior and presenting oneself in certain inappropriate ways dishonors God and hinders the spread of the gospel. The way we dress and behave in Christian community should never give the church a bad reputation to unbelievers. It is quite possible that the Corinthian believers, overly excited about their freedom in Christ had become unruly in dress and attitudes towards one another. This always brings shame to Jesus.

Fourth, Christian women can legitimately pray and prophesy in the church gatherings. Paul takes this for granted. There is nothing in the text that prohibits this at all. In fact, it is encouraged, so long as it is done correctly.

## 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-15

These are some of the most debated verses in Scripture. Some even argue that Timothy was not written by Paul because they interpret the text to be in direct contradiction with other Pauline writing<sup>33</sup>. We state upfront that we believe 1 Timothy is authoritative Scripture and Pauline. We believe it is a personal letter<sup>34</sup> from the Apostle Paul to Timothy, a young church planter.

The central concern of 1 Timothy is false teachers (their teaching and lifestyle) that are threatening to destroy the church. Paul urged Timothy to stay behind in Ephesus to put a stop to their work (1 Tim 1:3-4). While there is much debate about the content of false teaching, some clues are given throughout the book: *myths* and *genealogies* that promoted controversial speculation (1:4), marital and food restrictions (4:1-2), godless myths and old wives' tales (4:7), and opposing ideas (to Scripture) that were being called 'knowledge' (6:20). Prominent men in the church were teaching blasphemy (1:20) and it seems even some of the *elders* were being ensnared (5:19-20). The result was constant controversies, quarrels and frictions (6:4-5) and some had even wandered away from the faith (6:10). Ephesus was a church in big trouble and Paul is writing to strengthen young Timothy for the daunting task that lay ahead. For the Apostle Paul, the primary cause of false teaching is a lack of understanding the Scriptures (1:7; 6:4, 20) while the solution is good teaching (2:12; 3:2; 4:6-8; 11-16; 5:17) that comes from elders who exhibit godly character (3:1-13) as opposed to false teachers who don't (6:4-5). Paul's great goal is that "*people would know how to conduct themselves in God's household which is the church of the living God*" (3:15).

indicating they were most likely read publicly to the entire church.

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<sup>33</sup> Elisabeth S Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*.

<sup>34</sup> While personal, the letter was not private because all the pastoral letters finish with the words "grace be with you all".

Against this backdrop of strife and contention, Paul urges first of all for “*quiet and peaceful lives in all godliness and holiness*” (2:1-3) because it pleases God (2:4) and is a powerful witness to those not yet saved (2:4-5).

Paul then turns his attention to Christian men in 2:8. He commands them to pray without “*anger and disputing*”. Somehow, even their prayers, particularly amongst the men had been impacted by false teaching and the men were fighting. Maybe the prayer had become a convenient way to take pot-shots at each other while appearing to be spiritual. Paul strongly rebukes this behaviour, insisting that the men must pray in *peace* with one another. The *lifting up of holy hands* (2:8) could refer to a physical posture or a to a right heart (Psalm 24:4).

In a similar way, Paul then turns his attention to Christian women in 2:9. Apparently, there were women in the church dressing immodestly, with showy dresses (elaborate hairstyles, expensive and flash jewellery, expensive clothes) that was potentially sending out signals of self-indulgence, independence and sexual promiscuity. Paul insists that all Christian women must dress in a way “*that is appropriate for women who profess to worship God*” (2:10).

Paul then instructs Christian women “*to learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.*” (2:11-12). The sole imperative in this verse is the command *to learn*, while the rest explains how the learning should take place. It’s hard for us living in a modern western context to grasp just how radical Paul’s instruction is here. Main-stream education in the first century was mostly not available to women but Paul expected all Christian women in the church to learn alongside their brothers in Christ.

Virtually every word is disputed in these verses, with most of the debate over whether the prohibition (2:12) is universal and absolute or temporal and specific to Ephesus. One attempt to explain away the prohibition is that Ephesian women were less educated than men and more susceptible to false doctrine, so until properly taught, they had to remain silent<sup>35</sup>. There are two problems with this argument: First, Paul makes no reference to a lack of education, otherwise he could have said “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority...until she has received a proper education.” Not all Ephesian women were uneducated and we certainly know that Pricilla, an educated woman, was in Ephesus (2 Tim 4:19). Second, Paul instructed Timothy to “*command certain people not to teach false doctrine any longer*” (1:3). To prohibit all women from teaching because some were less educated does not follow Paul’s instruction to only target those individuals in the church who were guilty of false teaching. Third, Paul gives the reason for the prohibition – God’s creational order (2:13).

A second approach is to suggest there was a strong feminist<sup>36</sup> outlook in Ephesus (allegedly linked to the cult of Artemis<sup>37</sup>). Many fanciful reconstructions have been made of female cults in Ephesus and their impact in the church worship, but they are speculative and often overstate their case. While women certainly were being ensnared by false teachers (2 Tim 3:5-9), “*none of the references to false teachers in the Pastoral Epistles ever explicitly numbers women among them.*”<sup>38</sup> And also, details of the actual content of the false teaching are very sparse.

A third approach is to suggest that Paul is only prohibiting a *certain kind of teaching*, namely women teaching in a domineering way. The argument changes the grammar in a way we believe doesn’t hold up<sup>39</sup> and insists that the

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<sup>35</sup> Craig Keener,

<sup>36</sup> Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*

<sup>37</sup> Sharon Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus*.

<sup>38</sup> Craig Bloomberg, *Two views on Women in Ministry*

<sup>39</sup> Philip Payne suggests that the use of the expression “*not x nor y but z*” in the Bible always communicates one concept and that the second term is subordinate to the first rather than coordinating with it. To take an everyday example, he is saying that that the instruction: *no running or*

*jumping in the courtyard* actually means *running is ok as long as you are not jumping at the same time*. But a basic understanding of grammar shows this is not the case. Payne gives a long list of sample verses but some just don’t add up. Example 1: Matt 6:28 “*Lillies do NOT work NOR spin*”. Payne’s interpretation makes this verse mean a spinning type of labour. Example 2: Gal 1:16-17 “*was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did NOT confer with flesh and blood, NOR did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, BUT I went away into Arabia;*

word authority (*authenteo*) has a negative meaning<sup>40</sup>.

We think the best explanation of the text is to keep to a simple reading. We consider: first, *teaching*<sup>41</sup> to be positive activity and therefore *authority* to be positive as well, both activities fundamental to eldership (see 3:1-13). Second, the reason for the prohibition is actually the one in the text – “For Adam was formed first, and not Eve” (2:13-14) and not some other speculative reason (i.e. the Amazonian cult, female false teachers) absent from the text. Third, this prohibition is universal rather than culturally specific because it refers to God’s creational order. And fourth, seems to best fit with what the rest of Scripture teaches on this subject (i.e. the other biblical texts in this appendix).

In 2:13 Paul goes back to God’s original *creational order* before the Fall. This is tremendously significant because many teach that gender roles are the result of the Fall. But in Genesis 1-2, God gave Adam the responsibility to lead the partnership towards God. Paul seems to be saying that when women participate in teaching and authority (eldership) the creational order is broken in some way. In 2:14 Paul highlights that Eve was deceived and sinned. He seems to be pointing to the moment when the serpent subverted God’s order, managing to get Eve to act independently and break the command.

What do we make of 2:15? If Paul has just highlighted Eve’s sin and the disruption to her God given role, then maybe 2:15 is contrasting her fall with her salvation. Why talk about child birth? Paul seems to be pointing to a God-given gender role only Eve can perform (contrasted with the gender role only men should perform – *teaching* and *exercising authority* in the church). It’s

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*and again I returned to Damascus.*” Payne’s interpretation becomes highly problematic because it makes Paul say he refused to consult with any human who was an apostle in Jerusalem. Why would he deliberately avoid just the apostles of the church?

<sup>40</sup> This is a matter of great debate because the word *authenteo* is a *bapax legomenon*, meaning it only appears once in all of Scripture. The root concept of the word is authority upon which there is universal agreement but the sharp disagreement is how that authority is used. Egalitarians insist the word must have a negative meaning.

clear that a woman is not saved by child bearing because the Apostle Paul himself spells out clearly “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not of yourselves (e.g. childbirth or anything else!), so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:8-9). Neither are women saved by embracing their God-given gender role. They are saved “if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (2:15b). Therefore, embracing our God-given gender roles is not how we get saved but is certainly one of the ways we demonstrate we are saved.

Therefore, we believe the text is not prohibiting women from exercising all forms of teaching and authority in the church but one specific role, that of authoritative teaching when the church gathers together, a role that belongs to qualified men.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 14:33-40

Paul begins by teaching that Christian worship should be characterised by order. Disorder or chaos is the work of the evil one. God is a God of order and peace. The context of chapter 14 is correcting and reining in disorderly conduct and inappropriate use of spiritual gifts in the community of God.

*“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.”* (14:34-35).

The first question to ask is: what does silence mean? Is it complete silence, so that a woman may never talk in church? A careful reading of the entire section (chapters 11-14) indicates this is not the case for several reasons: First, Paul has already talked about women praying and

H. Baldwin did a study of 85 known occurrences of the usage of the word outside of Scripture. His study found that the word could have a positive, neutral or negative meaning and that the context was important for understanding the word. The church has traditionally understood the word to have a positive meaning until recently.

<sup>41</sup> The word *teach* means “to give instruction” and is always positive unless it is modified by another word (e.g. false teaching). The word is used all over the Bible.

prophesying in the church and at no moment has Paul silenced the sisters (1 Cor 11:1-13).

Second, when correcting the use of tongues in the church (14:28), Paul commands the speaker of tongues to be silent. This does not mean total and absolute silence but rather particular silence in regard to using the gift of tongues. It would seem that if no interpreter is available, then the person must be silent with regards to the use of tongues but is free to pray or prophesy.

Therefore, the *silence* in v34 and the instruction that women “*are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission*” should be seen in its immediate context of *evaluating* prophesy (14:29; 32). The general principle Paul establishes is that only two or three prophets could prophesy at a time but each prophesy had to be “*carefully weighed up*” (14:29). The evaluation of prophesy is not a spiritual gift. It requires listening carefully to what is being said and then checking it against sound doctrine. Because maintaining sound doctrine is the work of elders, it was ultimately their responsibility to “quality-control” all prophetic utterances. Given that 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 restrict the office of elder to qualified men, it makes sense that women should participate in prophesy but leave its evaluation to elders.

## ELDERS

As soon as churches were planted, Paul’s first major focus was to appoint elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) in every town. These appointments were not made lightly but “*with prayer and fasting*” (Acts 14:23). It is of significance that the list of qualifications Paul gave were the same for the great metropolis of Ephesus (1 Tim 3:1-13) as they were for rural Crete (Titus 1:5-9), indicating that the practice of appointing elders and the qualifications they had to meet were common across the early churches. When churches elected elders, it was not to be done on the basis of popularity but against the qualifications.

The list of qualification in 1 Timothy and Titus, are mostly about character (mostly in the home)

because “*if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?*” (1 Tim 3:5). While it appears that some elders may focus more on teaching than others (1 Tim 5:17), the one functional requirement *all* elders must meet is the *ability to teach* (1 Tim 3:2). This is the key qualification difference between elders and deacons<sup>42</sup>. It is the role of elders to teach sound doctrine (1 Tim 4:16) and perform “quality control” of church doctrine, so that God’s people are protected from false teaching and false teachers (Acts 20:29).

We believe that the office of elder is restricted to qualified men for the following reasons: First, the two passages in Scripture that address this topic most directly include specific male qualifications (husband of one wife / faithful to his wife, managing his household well / keeping his children submissive). Second, 1 Timothy 3 immediately follows Paul’s instruction: “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority*” (2:18). Further, in ch. 2 Paul restricts a certain kind of teaching and a certain kind of rule. Similarly, in ch. 3 Paul immediately addresses the office of elder and its role which focuses on these two very issues – *teaching* and *ruling*.

To summarise, we believe that the office of elder is restricted to qualified men. While all Christians, both men and women, are called to small ‘t’ teach and admonish one-another (Col 3:16), elders are to big ‘T’ teach when the church gathers for worship.

## DEACONS

The biblical data speaks of deacons in several ways. At the outset, the word deacon (διδάκονος) means servant, and shares the same root as the word ministry (διακονέω). Together, both words imply the idea of serving or rendering assistance to another. For example, the Bible presents Jesus as the archetypal deacon (Mark 10:45; Luke 12:37; Rom 15:8); Jesus calls all people to be a deacon (John 12:26); but there are also several instances where the role of a deacon seems to be given a special status or function within the church (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim 3:8-13). In

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<sup>42</sup> The ability to teach is not a requirement for deacons. However, the list of character qualifications for deacons is startlingly similar to those for an elder.

the later of these instances, deacons are specifically set aside to perform practical ‘serving’ functions that free elders up to teach, shepherd and oversee within the church.

On the surface, one might conclude that the role of a deacon is gender specific. For example, in 1 Tim 3 Paul seems to restrict the role to men. However, there are three reasons we might conclude that the office is open to women. First, there are clear examples of women who function as deacons within the church (Rom 16:1-2). Second, because the role of a deacon is to serve and support the role of an elder, there is no sense in which the role of a deacon necessitates teaching or exercising authority over a man. Third, although there is debate, contextually and grammatically, 1 Tim 3:11 seems to explicitly support women being deacons. Verse 11 begins with ὡσαύτως which means ‘similarly’ or ‘likewise.’ This word is repeated from v. 8 and directs our attention back to v. 2 to supply the verb that governs the passage. In this context, we are best to understand that Paul is speaking about women who fulfil a leadership role within the church as deacons, not wives of deacons. Together then, the role of deacon should be open to qualified men and women.

## **PROPHECY**

While prophecy will be covered in a separate document, it is helpful to say something about it here. Some argue that prophecy, teaching and preaching are all the same thing. We argue they are not. The Bible has one word for prophesy and another word for teaching. Clearly, they are different.

The elders agreed that because of the salvation-historical developments between the Testaments—the coming of Christ—there is substantial discontinuity between prophecy in the OT and the NT. This does not, however, mean that prophecy has no role in the church today. We believe that although the inscripturated word of God must be central in our church, we must also not despise prophecy. The principles above were generally agreed upon, and there was support for John Piper’s definition of prophecy (see below), except for some reservations about the word spontaneous.

*“Prophecy... is a regulated message or report in human words usually made to the gathered believers based on a spontaneous, personal revelation from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction or guidance but not necessarily free from a mixture of human error, and thus needing assessment on the basis of the apostolic (Biblical) teaching and mature spiritual wisdom.”*

The elders also recognised that because of our conservative background, we must be careful not to unnecessarily despise prophecy (1 Thess 5:20). Indeed, with God’s help, and being guided by his word, we must recognise that prophecy is a gift given by God to encourage and build his church.