

"YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS"

Reflections on the Divine Call

When the Holy Spirit prophesied through the ancient prophet Joel (2:28–29) and repeated His prediction through the apostle Peter (Acts 2:17–18), how shall we understand that divinely promised outpouring of “My Spirit” upon “your sons and your daughters” (v. 17, NKJV)? What follows is a biblical, pastoral reflection on the answer to that question.

CREATION

The opening salvo of Holy Scripture recites our human story writ large in the narrative of Adam and Eve. The divine record of Genesis 1–3 portrays man and woman in their complementary unity as the expression of the image of their Creator: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them’ (1:26–27, NKJV).

Male and female together form the *imago dei*. Embedded in the story of Adam and Eve are these twenty statements depicting man and woman as equals:¹

1. God creates both male and female in God’s image and likeness (1:26–27; cf. 5:1–2).
2. God gives both male and female rule over animals and all the earth (1:26b, 28).
3. God gives both male and female the same blessing and tells them together to be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth, and subdue it (1:28; cf. 5:2).
4. God speaks directly to both man and woman (1:28–29 “to them,” “to you” plural twice).
5. God gives male and female together all plants for food (1:29 “to you” plural).
6. Woman is a “help” to man, a noun the Old Testament never uses elsewhere of a subordinate (2:18, 20).
7. Woman “corresponds to” man, literally “in front of” man, face-to-face, not below (2:18, 20).
8. God makes woman from the man’s rib, so she is made of the same substance as he (2:21–23).
9. The man recognizes, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (2:23, NKJV).
10. “Father and mother” are identified without hierarchical distinction (2:24).
11. A man is “united” to his wife, implying oneness (2:24).
12. A man becomes “one flesh” with his wife, implying unity (2:24).
13. Both the man and woman are naked and feel no shame, sharing moral sensibility (2:25).
14. The woman and the man are together at the temptation and fall (3:6); both faced temptation.
15. Both the woman and the man eat the forbidden fruit (3:6), both exercising a (bad) moral choice.

16. The eyes of both are opened, they realize they are naked, and sew coverings (3:7).
17. Both hide from God (3:8), showing they both experience guilt.
18. God addresses both directly (3:9–13, 16–19), showing both have access to God.
19. Both pass the blame (3:12–13), showing both have this weakness.
20. God announces to both specific consequences of their sin (3:16–19); both are responsible.

Ellen White reflects on this shared unity and equality in the image of God: “Created to be ‘the image and glory of God’ (1 Corinthians 11:7²), Adam and Eve had received endowments not unworthy of their high destiny. Graceful and symmetrical in form, regular and beautiful in feature, their countenances glowing with the tint of health and the light of joy and hope, they bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only. Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator’s glory. Endowed with high mental and spiritual gifts, Adam and Eve were made but ‘little lower than the angels’ (Hebrews 2:7), that they might not only discern the wonders of the visible universe, but comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations.”³

Thus the narrative of Holy Scripture begins with the declaration that in the union and unity of humanity’s maleness and femaleness is found the fullest expression of “the image of God” on Earth.⁴

Does the subsequent moral collapse of Adam and Eve negate that divine ideal? Do the ensuing millennia of humanity’s heartache and dysfunction neutralize God’s original intentions for man and woman? What does the eventual incarnation of the Creator into the human family reveal about that ideal and those intentions?

REDEMPTION

While the life and ministry of Jesus did not provide an overt confrontation with the moral ills of slavery, racial discrimination, and gender inequities, nevertheless in the life of “God with us” we can trace the mind of God in the heart of Christ. Regarding the place of women in a post-Fall world, Jesus injected compelling evidences of God’s intended Creation idea of equality. “The Gospels show that whenever possible—while remaining mindful of the cultural constraints of the day—Christ gave women special opportunities to fill a primary role in the main events of his redemptive ministry such as his birth, miracles, outreach missions, death, and resurrection.”⁵

Gilbert Bilezikian identifies nine direct inclusions of women in Jesus’ life and ministry: (1) four women are included along with Mary into the Messiah’s genealogical record (Matthew 1); (2) a woman receives the first news of the incarnation (Luke 1:32–35); (3) a woman, with her wedded husband, provides the occasion for the first divine sign of Jesus’ eschatological glory (John 2:1–11); (4) a woman is the

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first Samaritan convert (John 4:7–42); (5) a woman is the first Gentile convert (Matthew 15:21–28); (6) a woman receives the first resurrection teaching (John 11:23–27); (7) a woman manifests the first perception of the cross (Mark 14:3–9); (8) a woman is the first to witness the Resurrection (Matthew 28:9; John 20:16); and, (9) women are the first witnesses of the Resurrection (Matthew 28:10; John 20:18).⁶

Bilezikian observes: “This list of exceptional roles played by women in the crucial events of the life of Christ suggests that he made deliberate choices concerning the place of women in the economy of redemption. The message conveyed by those decisions is not to be found in mere chronological primacy (which according to Jesus is of no advantage; see Matthew 20:16), but rather in the fact that Jesus himself gave women a foundational and prominently constitutional role in the history of redemption. Any subsequent reduction of the conspicuous involvement of women in the community of redemption could be perpetrated only in violation of the will of its divine founder.”⁷

In his book-length examination of Paul's attitude and practice toward women in the early Christian church, Philip Payne notes the example of the Lord of Paul: “Paul affirms, ‘I follow the example of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Christ's example in all

his deeds and words was to treat women as persons equal with men. He respected their intelligence and spiritual capacity as is evident in the great spiritual truths he originally taught to women [Samaritan woman, Martha, et al].... Although a woman's testimony was not recognized in the courts, Jesus demonstrated his respect for their testimony by appearing first to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection (John 20:14–18) and instructing her to tell the others. After Jesus taught the Samaritan woman, she acted as the first missionary to her people and many of her people believed (John 4:39–42).”⁸

Payne further observes: “Jesus gives no hint that the nature of God's will for women is different than for men. He made no distinction in the righteousness demanded of both.... He calls a crippled woman a ‘daughter of Abraham’ (Luke 13:16), a linguistic usage seventy years prior to the first recorded rabbinic equivalent (Str-B 2:200). He says, ‘You are all brothers’ (Matt. 23:8), and he treats obligations to father and mother equally (Mark 7:10–12).”⁹

But what about Jesus' choice of only males as His disciples and apostles? Isn't Christ's all-male apostolate a template for us today? In reality, Jesus' inner circle of disciples was not only all-male—it was all-free-Jewish-male; that is, the first formal leaders of His church on Earth included no slave, no freed slave, no Gentile, no person of color, nobody except free Jewish males. So, shall the third millennial church follow suit?

And yet, didn't women minister to Christ throughout His ministry? Then why did He not include them in His inner circle?

“It is one thing for a number of women to be mentioned as following Jesus from time to time in his preaching in the towns (Mark 15:40–41; Luke 8:1–3), but traveling full time for three years with late night meetings such as at the Garden of Gethsemane and spending periods of time in the

wilderness are quite another thing. Strong cultural objections and moral suspicions would undoubtedly be raised not only about Jesus, but also about the men whom he chose to be with him. Married women could hardly leave their families for such a long period, and single women would have been even more suspicious. To have chosen women disciples would have raised legitimate suspicion undermining the gospel.”¹⁰

A careful examination of the life of the Creator lived out in “the Word... made flesh” (John 1:14, KJV) reveals the dignity, courtesy, and mercy Jesus extended to both men and women, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the Jew and the Gentile. In His living, His ministering, His saving, it is compellingly clear that in Christ there was neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female—for in all, He saw “heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29, NKJV).

It would be the task of His church to determine how the walls of separation might be brought down.

EKKLESIA

Paul, who championed the life and the way of Christ, perpetuates the example of Jesus in his own ministry with women throughout both the church and the Roman Empire. More than any other apostle, Paul examines and teaches the role of women within the mission and ministry of the community of faith.

Philip Payne, whose 500-page tome is arguably the most extensive examination of Paul’s statements regarding women in the early church, notes Paul’s attitude toward their ministries by the titles he gave them: “The titles that Paul gives to the women he mentions imply leadership positions: ‘deacon’ (Romans 16:1), ‘leader’ (Romans 16:2), ‘my fellow worker in Christ Jesus’ (Romans 16:3; Philippians 4:3), and ‘apostle’ (Romans 16:7). Furthermore Paul

describes them as fulfilling functions associated with church leadership: they ‘worked hard in the Lord’ (Rom 16:6, 12) and ‘contended at my side in the cause of the gospel’ (Philippians 4:3). Over two-thirds of the colleagues whom Paul praises for their Christian ministry in Romans 16:1–16—seven of the ten—are women.”¹¹

Regarding Payne’s reference to the title apostle, there is debate about whether the apostle Junia, mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:7, was a man or a woman: “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen [translated kinsmen in NASB and relatives in NIV] and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me” (NKJV). Two recent works, Eldon Jay Epp’s book *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*¹² and Nancy Vyhmeister’s *Ministry* article “Junia the Apostle,”¹³ re-examine the biblical text and the extrabiblical literature pertinent to determining the gender of Ἰουνιᾶν (the accusative form of the name Ἰουνιᾶς, which can be translated today as masculine or feminine depending on the accent—though the oldest uncial manuscripts used no accents at all, thus necessitating the reader to interpret the gender of this name).

Vyhmeister notes that a review of Christian Greek and Latin writers in the first millennium of Christianity indicates that the consistent interpretation (16 of these 18 writers) is that Junia in Romans 16:7 refers to a woman. Consider John of Chrysostom’s comment on the mention in Romans 16:7 of Andronicus and Junia: “Who are of note among the Apostles. And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion (*philosophia*) of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!”¹⁴

As a summation of her exegetical examination of the text and her review of early Christian writings, Vyhmeister concludes: “It is difficult to complete this study without finding that Paul is referring to a woman named Junia, who, together with Andronicus (probably her husband), was part of the NT group of apostles. Paul recognized her as one of the apostles, a woman who was willing to suffer for the gospel she was busily spreading.”^{15, 16}

The reality is that irrespective of the gender of this apostle named Junia, the other appellations of leadership Paul extends to women colleagues in ministry in Romans 16 clearly reveal his attitude toward their role in the spiritually authoritative ministry of the church. Moreover, his commendation of these women is all the more noteworthy in light of the social attitudes toward women in the first century A.D. Paul’s high regard for the leadership of the women he lists in Romans 16 must illumine any examination of his teachings regarding the role of women in the home and in the church.¹⁷

GALATIANS 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NIV).

Yes, Paul’s declaration in Galatians 3:28 proclaims a new spiritual unity within the faith community. By virtue of the gospel of Christ through Calvary’s sacrifice, heretofore disparate and separated segments of humanity are bound together as one—Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, males and females. “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ” (v. 27, NIV) and “you are all one in Christ Jesus” (v. 28, NIV).

But to limit Paul’s declaration to solely a spiritual unity or spiritual standing is to miss the radical assertion of Galatians 3:28. In the previous chapter, Paul describes his public confrontation with Peter

over his duplicitous caving in to the circumcision party from Jerusalem and reneging on his practice of eating with the Gentile converts. Paul’s public challenge of his fellow apostle was in defense of more than spiritual unity; Paul was defending the practical, everyday ecclesiastical unity and equality of status within the church that Jews and Gentiles must enjoy in Christ.

To suggest that Paul champions the equality of ecclesiastical status for Jews and Gentiles (as he does in Galatians) and for slave and free (as he does with Philemon), but then conclude he does not intend equality of spiritual and ecclesiastical status for male and female, is neither logical nor faithful to the biblical text.

“Galatians 3:28 carries important social and practical implications. Ethnic-religious, socioeconomic, and gender barriers are overcome in Christ. Paul’s repeated insistence on the practical implications of spirituality throughout Galatians necessitate that the equal standing that Christ has opened to Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, male and female not be divorced from a corresponding equality of social standing in the practical life of the church.”¹⁸

1 CORINTHIANS 11:3

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (NKJV).

For some this Pauline statement is conclusive biblical evidence that male headship is the divinely ordained order for both the home and the church. But such a conclusion confuses the meaning of κεφαλή (“head”) for authority or rule, when the “majority view in recent scholarship has shifted to understand ‘head’ (κεφαλή) in this passage to mean ‘source’ rather than ‘authority,’ including many who argue that Paul believed men should have authority over women in social relationships.”¹⁹

Payne goes on to list 15 key textual and linguistic reasons for translating the Greek word for “head” as “source.”²⁰ While it is not in the scope of this paper to recite all these textual evidences, several of the reasons deserve reflection. Colossians 1:18 describes Christ as “the head [κεφαλή] of the body, the church” (NKJV). The TEV renders it, “He is the source of the body’s life,” the NEB “the origin.” Payne notes, “Source makes good sense as the meaning of nine of Paul’s eleven metaphorical uses of κεφαλή, whereas not one instance can be conclusively demonstrated to mean ‘authority over.’”²¹

Furthermore, the 1 Corinthians 11:3 sequence—“the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”—is not using a descending or ascending hierarchical order of authority, but rather a chronological order. Namely, Christ was the “head” or “source” of man at creation, and the man²² (Adam) was the “head” or “source” of woman (Eve) in that same creation, and God was the “head” or “source” of Christ in the incarnation.

Had Paul’s intent been to establish a hierarchical chain of command, the most logical or lucid way to present that chain would have been: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. Paul uses the listing of ordinal hierarchy elsewhere, as in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed these in the church: *first* apostles, *second* prophets, *third* teachers, *after that* miracles...” (NKJV). But the rabbi apostle rejects a descending or ascending hierarchy in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and instead portrays the sequence as follows: Christ is the head of man, the man is the head of woman, and God is the head of Christ.

Why? Consider Gilbert Bilezikian’s conclusion:

“In this section which concludes with the declaration that ‘everything comes from God’ (v. 12 NIV), Paul shows that all relations of derivation find their origin in God. He was the initial giver of all life. But

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in chronological sequence, the origin of man was in Christ, the Logos of creation. Second, the origin of woman was man since she was formed from him. Third, the origin of the incarnate Christ was God with the birth of Jesus, the Son of God.... The apostle’s use of the word *head* to describe servant-provider of life [“source”] relationships served as a rebuff to the Judaizers, who exploited it from within their own hierarchy-obsessed tradition to marginalize the Corinthian women in the life and ministry of the church.”²³

Thus it is no coincidence that Paul immediately moves (v. 4ff) to what it means for this nonhierarchical relationship of men and women to be lived out in the church. “Both men and women may pray and prophesy in the assembly of believers. These two verses [‘Every man praying or prophesying...every woman who prays or prophesies...’ 1 Corinthians 11:4, 5] present one of the clearest statements in the Bible about men and women having the same access to ministry in the church. They may both lead in worship and speak the Word of God to God’s people.”²⁴

We naturally conclude that “praying or prophesying” by a man was done in the setting of a public house church. It is only natural to conclude the same about a woman who “prays or prophesies.”

It is, therefore, “a striking affirmation of woman’s equal standing with men in church leadership that Paul in verse 5 simply assumes that ‘every woman,’ like ‘every man,’ could pray and prophesy in public.... Thus, the terms “prayer” and “prophecy” suggest the entire scope of leadership in worship. Since Paul ranks prophets above teachers in 1 Corinthians 12:28, since he associates prophecy with revelation, knowledge, and instruction in 14:6, and since prayer and prophecy encompass both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of worship, Paul’s approval of women prophesying should not be interpreted as excluding the related ministries of revelation, knowledge and instruction.”²⁵

The dismissive caveat that women prophesying in church does not carry the same “spiritual authority” as men teaching in church is vacuous. Paul himself ranks the gift of prophecy higher than the gift of teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:28, where he clearly intends a prioritization of authority through spiritual gifts.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:12

“For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God” (NIV).

Paul quotes from the LXX account of the Creation, using the identical phrase—ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός—to describe the woman (Eve) originating “from man” (Adam). By this Paul is reminding the church that in fact man and woman come from each other—Eve from Adam at Creation, and man from his mother at birth. Thus Paul, on the basis of his statement in 11:8—“For man is not from woman, but woman from man” (NKJV)—precludes the inference that from the beginning, man has been elevated over woman hierarchically. Rather, both man and woman are mutually dependent upon each other. Thus, Paul “emphasizes that God has ordained the equality of man and woman. It is

ultimately God who repudiates a hierarchy of man over woman based upon source.”²⁶

1 TIMOTHY 2:12

“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence” (NKJV).

This text has been described as “the most crucial verse regarding women in ministry.... Since this is the only verse in Scripture that, at least according to this translation, prohibits women from teaching or being in positions of authority over men, and since the meaning of the word sometimes translated ‘have authority over’ (αὐθεντεῖν) is debated and occurs nowhere else in Scripture, it demands careful examination.”²⁷

The central theme and overriding concern that runs throughout Paul’s pastoral letter to Timothy is the havoc raised by false teachers and their heretical teachings in the church of Ephesus. Paul had warned the Ephesian elders at his farewell, “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29–30, NKJV). The first epistle to Timothy is evidence that his prediction had come true. Paul’s urgent concern for Timothy’s confrontation of these false teachers is laid out in the first six verses; then explicit counsel on how to deal with them is interspersed throughout the rest of the letter.²⁸ In fact, so concerned is the apostle with the false teaching that “nearly every verse in this letter relates to it.”²⁹

The premise that women in the church were caught up with the false teachers and their teachings explains why “no other book of the Bible has a higher proportion of verses focused specifically on problems regarding women: 21 out of 113 verses (1 Timothy 2:9–15; 4:7; 5:3–7, 9–16).”³⁰ Because

1 Timothy is a pastoral letter from the apostle to his young associate, the counsel necessarily reflects the pastoral and congregational context of the Ephesian church. To suggest that Paul intended his context-specific admonition prohibiting women from teaching in the church in Ephesus to be applicable to the universal church overlooks Paul's clear recognition in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women may both pray and prophecy in worship.

Furthermore, Paul extols the teaching ministry that Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice had in his young life (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-16). As noted earlier, Paul's listing of seven women who served with him in ministry and leadership in the churches (Romans 16) belies the suggestion that in 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul is universally prohibiting such authoritative ministry and leadership. What is more, at around the same time Paul wrote this letter to Timothy he also wrote to Titus, another pastoral associate of the apostle, with the instruction that "older women" serve the church as "teachers of good things" (Titus 2:3).³¹ Elsewhere Paul commanded the church in Colossae, including its women, to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you [plural] teach [no gender distinction is made] and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you [plural] sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16, NIV). And in the wider New Testament witness, the observation in Hebrews 5:12 that "by this time you ought to be teachers" (NKJV) was clearly addressed to both the men and women in the church and offers no gender restriction. Thus to suggest in 1 Timothy 2:12 a universal mandate prohibiting women from authoritative teaching contradicts both the practice and teaching of Paul. First Timothy 2:12 is Paul's divinely inspired counsel to the pastor in dealing with the women of that congregation who were being deceived by itinerant false teachers and were

assuming authority over men in propagating those false teachings.

"Paul, who more than any other NT writer distinguished his personal advice for a particular situation from permanent instructions, did not give 1 Timothy 2:12's restrictions on women in the Ephesian church any universalization qualifier. Nor did he claim that these restrictions on women were from the Lord or that they should apply in all the churches [as he did in Romans 12:3 ("to every one of you"); 1 Corinthians 4:16-17 ("everywhere in every church"); Galatians 5:3 ("to every man"); 1 Timothy 2:1 ("for all men"); and 1 Timothy 2:8 ("in every place")]. There is no such universalizing phrase in 1 Timothy 2:12.... One cannot simply assume it to be universal any more than one can assume that the prohibition of braided hair, gold, pearls, and wearing expensive clothing (2:9) is universal or that men everywhere must raise their hands when they pray (2:8)."³²

1 TIMOTHY 2:13-15

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control" (NKJV).

From these verses some have argued that both the creation order of Eve after Adam and her subsequent deception and fall are the apostle's biblical rationale for a universal prohibition of women from exercising authoritative teaching in the church. But is that in fact Paul's intent?

As already noted, Paul's warning in this pastoral epistle regarding the deception of false teachers in the church in Ephesus "who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins" (2 Timothy 3:6, NASB) provides the context for his counsel to Timothy to prohibit such women from exercising authoritative teaching in that

Eve's deception vividly illustrates the danger when a woman is deceived.

congregation. Their claim of enlightened authority precipitates Paul's admonition to these Ephesian women to cease and desist, as it were, out of respect for their properly designated Christian teachers. The basis for such respect, Paul declares, is twofold: Adam was created first, and Eve was deceived first. In the narrative of the Creation and the Fall, Paul finds biblical grounds for his command to these women to respect their congregational leadership.

But do those biblical grounds, applied to the Ephesian turmoil over false teaching, provide the basis for a universal application to all churches? The parallel passage in 1 Corinthians teaches otherwise. "For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God" (11:12, NKJV). While it is true that Eve was formed from Adam, Paul reminds the Corinthians that through childbirth man also comes from woman. Thus Paul corroborates the divinely intended mutual interdependence of man and woman from the beginning. Here in 1 Timothy, Paul makes the same point by balancing the creation order with childbirth: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve.... Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing" (2:13, 15). Thus in both passages Paul adds mitigating evidence to the creation order to affirm God's intended interdependence of the genders. For just as men are dependent upon a woman (their mothers) for their physical existence (1 Corinthians 11), even so are men dependent upon a woman (Mary) for the birth of their Savior and thus their spiritual existence (1 Timothy 2).

"The terrible consequences of Eve's deception highlight the seriousness of the deception of women

in Ephesus. Yet the story of Eve also offers women hope and dignity. Although women experience pain in childbirth as a result of the fall, a woman has given birth to the promised Seed who will destroy Satan and overcome the fall. Not only was woman the vehicle for the entry into the world of sin, death, and the power of Satan, she was also the vehicle for the entry into the world of the Savior who delivers people from sin and death."³³

Paul does not establish from the creation order an anthropological principle that all women are thus subordinated to all men in or out of the church, nor does he establish from Eve's being deceived first an anthropological principle that women are by nature more easily deceived than are men.³⁴ Rather, "Paul restricted teaching by women because false teachers had deceived women in Ephesus.... [Thus] the most natural reading of the present tense "I am not permitting" in verse 12 [is] that these are temporary requirements in light of the influence of the false teaching among women in the Ephesian church. Eve's deception vividly illustrates the danger when a woman is deceived. Consequently, there is no need to attempt to find here a cryptic appeal to gender-based hierarchy established at creation."³⁵

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13

"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach.... Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (NKJV).

"Some are surprised to learn that in these Greek passages (1 Timothy 3:1-12; Titus 1:5-9) *there is not*

a single masculine pronoun. Rather it is the English translations that insert the masculine pronoun in these passages up to fourteen times (NIV, NAB) in Paul's list of requirements for the offices of overseer/bishop/elder and deacon."³⁶

But what about Paul's requirement that the elder and deacon be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)? Is not such a designation incontrovertible evidence that the spiritual leadership offices of elder and deacon are reserved for only men? The Greek phrase is *μίας γυναικὸς ἄνδρά*, literally one-woman man. Besides the obvious exclusion of polygamists (multiple women/wives) and adulterers (multiple sexual partners), what other exclusions does this single phrase cover? Some have isolated a single word from this phrase and used *ἄνδρα* ("man" or "husband") to function as a separate stand-alone qualification. But if it were acceptable to piecemeal this list of spiritual requirements, then one could just as logically dissect "one who rules his own house well" (1 Timothy 3:4) and reduce it to the phrase "his own house" in order to conclude that spiritual leaders must be house owners. Nobody would countenance such a reduction. Yet when a single word is isolated from the phrase one-woman man in order to insert an additional gender requirement, such reductionism is immediately logical to its proponents.

However, what is not logical are the implications of such a literal one-word reduction, when applied to the entire list. Along with marital relations ("husband of one wife," v. 2), Paul also lists requirements concerning children—"having his children in submission with all reverence" (v. 4), "ruling their children and their own houses well" (v. 12), and "having faithful children" (Titus 1:6). On the basis of a literal reading of these four phrases, the following categories of men would be disqualified: "single men; married men with no children;

married men with only one child; married men with children too young or too indifferent or obdurate to profess faith; married men with believing but disobedient children; married men with children who are believing and obedient but not respectful in all things."³⁷ Moreover, Gilbert Bilezikian notes that the literalistic exclusion of single men would begin with Christ Himself: "Jesus Christ—since he was single—would have been unqualified to exercise leadership among the people he taught before and after the resurrection. Paul and Barnabas, who both served as missionaries and occasional leaders of local churches (Acts 13:1), would have been violating Paul's marriage requirement since they were both working as single persons (1 Cor. 9:5). Finally, should this requirement for the Ephesian church be absolutized, men who accept Jesus's radical challenge to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matthew 19:12), thus exemplifying obedience to his call to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him (16:24)—the very men who should be upheld as exemplars of commitment before the Christian community—would be systematically and universally rejected from the most influential positions in church leadership. The personal sacrifice they would have made to serve the community with total dedication would be held against them as an impediment to such service."³⁸

But what about women in ministry? Does Paul's list of requirements for spiritual leadership and ministry (without the masculine pronoun) exclude women from this calling of God? All nine Greek words or expressions that Paul applies to overseers/elders in 1 Timothy 3 are applied to women elsewhere in this pastoral epistle: "good works" (2:10; 5:10); "blameless" (5:7); "wife of one man" (5:9); "temperate" (3:11); self-controlled (2:9, 15); respectable (2:9); "reverent" (3:11); subject to "condemnation" (5:12); and "well reported" (5:10).³⁹

The conclusion? The very traits once thought to be exclusively applied by Paul to men, as it turns out, were also applied by Paul to women—in this same epistle. Thus when the *one-woman man* phrase is correctly interpreted as excluding polygamous or adulterous individuals from ministering in spiritual leadership, there is no embedded or exegetical reason in 1 Timothy 2 and 3 to prohibit Spirit-gifted women from serving in the same overseer/elder offices that in the post-New Testament church eventually became reserved for men alone. The compelling evidence is that Paul never advocated an all-male clergy. His teaching and practice imitated the ministry of his Lord in purposefully widening the circle of spiritual leadership to include called and qualified disciples of either gender.

ESCHATOLOGY

Let us return to the opening question of this paper. When the Holy Spirit prophesied through the prophet Joel (2:28–29) and repeated His prediction through the apostle Peter (Acts 2:17–18), how shall we understand that divinely promised outpouring of “My Spirit” upon “your sons and your daughters”?

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days,
says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.
And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy
(Acts 2:17–18, NKJV).*

On the Day of Pentecost, when Peter began that first gospel sermon by quoting from the ancient prophet Joel, under the inspiration of the Spirit

either Peter or Luke inserted a new opening phrase to Joel’s prophecy: “in the last days.” Peter was not speaking of epochs, but rather of imminence. He would eventually write: “The end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7, NKJV). But before the Day of the Lord—and this was Peter’s point on Pentecost—there would be an eschatological, an apocalyptic outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon “all people.” And in that outpouring God would dismantle three walls that have kept the human family divided and separated from its beginnings: the wall of gender (men and women), the wall of age (young and old), and the wall of class (free and servant). And in that apocalyptic unleashing, the spiritual gifts of prophesying, visioning, and dreaming would be bestowed upon “all flesh.”

It is of interest that the spiritual gift Joel and Peter identify in that end-time outpouring is the gift of prophecy, a gift that is ranked second in Paul’s hierarchy of spiritual-leadership gifts: “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28, NKJV). This is the same gift that the Apocalypse predicts will be operative within the remnant community in the same “last days” (Revelation 12:17; 19:10).

If both genders are chosen by the Holy Spirit to receive the second-highest gift of spiritual authority in the church, the same would surely be true for the lesser gifts, including third-highest gift of spiritual authority, the gift of teaching. Thus the Bible predicts God’s apocalyptic calling and gifting of *both* genders, all ages, and all classes for the sake of His strategic endgame.

Having examined the salient passages of the New Testament concerning women in ministry, it is the conclusion of this paper that there is no credible, exegetical, biblical ground for a male-only

gospel ministry. God’s Edenic ideal of mutual interdependence, the example of the incarnated Creator Himself elevating both men and women to His cause, the clear Pauline embrace of both men and women in New Testament gospel ministry, the everlasting gospel’s “priesthood of all believers,” the very character and love of God that has from time immemorial sought to draw His intelligent creation into His Kingdom rule, the apocalyptic prediction

that both our sons and our daughters would be gifted similarly by God’s Spirit for His final work, and the fact that the founder of this movement was a woman who manifested the very gift predicted for this end-time community—all combine to support a decision of this community of faith to ordain both men and women for its apocalyptic, global mission and ministry for Christ. ■



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