

Men, Women and the Story of God

Soma's Position Paper on Men and Women in Home and Ministry

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Who's Story is It Anyway?

As we look at what God's intent for men and women is, we must look at the overarching Story of God. Men and women don't come to find out who they are and what they are created to do in isolation from the larger script of God's Story. Everything exists for the purpose of fulfilling God's intention playing out the roles of the Story he is writing.

Have you ever gone to a children's play or musical? Inevitably, one or more of the children will forget that they are playing a role or singing a song and become consumed with getting their parents' attention, jumping up and down, waving or even saying out loud "Hi mom and dad!" It's actually quite cute when its children, not so funny when you paid to see *Les Miserables* in New York. In that case, the writer, producer, and director have a story to tell and the players in the story are trained and prepared to play their part convincingly. If one of the actors decides they want the show to be all about them, it's not funny. It's not just disappointing. It would destroy the show. Funny for kids, destructive on Broadway, outright rebellious when creation decides to rewrite God's script and recast themselves into their own preferred role.

For many, the conversation about humanity's role in God's Story and in particular, the role of men and women, is a very emotionally charged discussion because we have started in the wrong place. We have believed this is Our Story. That God created us to play the part we want or in the manner we decide. For many of us, being all that we can be is the highest good. We have been taught that we are each writing our own script and we are the center of the story. Then, when the topic of men and women is brought up, we interpret what we hear through our own story and our own agenda. The only way to properly begin to discuss men and women, and God's intent in making us the way he did, is to start in the Beginning.

However, before we begin, we should hear Paul's words when exhorting the Philippians to "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."¹

If Jesus, the Son of God, God made flesh, was willing to not live for his own interest and humble himself to the point of not holding to his equality, but instead taking on the form of a servant to the point of death on a cross for sinners, then why would we also not submit to God's purposes in our design?

The Beginning

The story begins in Genesis 1-3 and ends in Revelation 19-22. It begins in a garden that God made with all the necessary elements to procreate a large human family that cultivates and subdues the created material into a garden-like city. And it ends with a garden-like city that Jesus brings about for his new creation family. It begins with a wedding of the first man and woman and

¹ Philippians 2:3-11

it ends with the final wedding of Jesus and his bride, the church. What happened in between these two gardens and these two weddings is the greatest love story ever told. This story begins with God: "In the beginning God..."² because it is the story of God's love. God chose to tell the story about himself through the crown of his Creation, man and woman. And he decided to tell the story of his love through marriage, the union of a man and woman in marriage. It is imperative to keep in mind that we are participants telling God's story as we work out our understanding of a man and woman's role in home and church.

Let's look at Genesis 1. God creates a place where humanity will thrive and then he creates them.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

*28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." - **Genesis 1:26-28***

What do we learn about God and how he created man and woman from these verses? First, we see that God made human beings in his own image. From later revelation, we know God's nature is triune and thus that God exists in community.³ This community is reflected in God's creation of human beings in community, male and female. Therefore, we see both male and female created in God's image and both received God's blessing and commission. They were both given the task of being fruitful, multiplying and filling the earth. Furthermore, they were both entrusted with the task of being God's vice-regents; his stewards to care for his creation in the way he would were he ruling it directly. So, what we see in Genesis 1 is God created man and woman with the same nature (both made in God's image) and the same two-fold purpose: multiply image bearers and steward God's creation for God's glory.

The first chapter of Genesis shows us a macro account – the big picture – of God's creation. The second chapter of Genesis shows us the micro account – the specific picture – of how God created man and woman.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

5 When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, 6 and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground— 7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. 8 And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

*15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." - **Genesis 2:4-17***

² Genesis 1:1

³ The "let us make..." in v. 26 is a possible pointer to God's triune existence in community. Although the best exegetical evidence points away from this understanding, the "let us" at least accords with the later revelation of God's triune nature in both the OT and NT.

In this fascinating account of man's creation, we discover the intimate nature of God's relationship with him. God forms man out of the dust of the ground, a fact which should rightly humble mankind. However, God himself chooses to condescend to breathe the breath of life into Adam and thus shows the intimacy of connection between God and man. Subsequently, we find that Adam wasn't just created to exist, he was created for a purpose, namely to work and keep the garden. Along with this responsibility to care for the garden, God places the responsibility of obedience upon the man. He is freed to eat of every tree of the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." 24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. - Genesis 2:18-25

Now we must ask, what was not good at this part of the story? As we do so, we must bear in mind Genesis 1:26-28. The key problem that emerges from the text in v. 20 is that man is alone. The reasons why this is not good are three-fold:

1. Man can not do the job of being fruitful and multiplying, filling the earth and subduing it alone – the garden is too big and there is no other way to have more humans without a complementary human
2. Man cannot image the relational nature of God alone
3. Man cannot rule over the creatures of the earth in a way that displays God fully alone

God's solution to the problem of man's aloneness is the creation of another image bearer, woman. She is like Adam in all the ways we've already explained yet she is also different from him. Several observations are relevant here:

1. First, She is made from man's rib – she came out of man.
2. She was made to be a helper fit for man – she is different than him and complements him
NOTE: Helper is the same word used for God when he comes to the aid of humanity. She is not lesser than man, but different in a way that complements who he is and helps him in light of his inadequacy⁴
3. She is named by the man

While there is a clear differentiation between man and woman in this narrative, there is an equally clear oneness that is presented in the text. The man and woman exist in a state of naked and shameless intimacy, both literal and figurative; they were united in every sense of the word. Their differences are clearly not a cause for strife in the perfection of a world untainted by sin and death.

While unity between man and woman is the overriding concern in Genesis 2, there is a sense of ordering that emerges. God made man first. In the Hebrew worldview, the firstborn was the rightful heir of the inheritance⁵. Adam was the firstborn human of all creation as well as the one

⁴ See Psalm 54:4

⁵ This is called primogeniture

first given the law by God of which he was responsible to steward. As the one through whom woman was made, Adam is head⁶ of the woman, which means he is both the source and the one in the position of authority⁷. This authority is grounded in the creational order and is evidenced in v. 23 as Adam has the authority to name Woman.

The Fall

As we all know, the narrative of Genesis 3 introduces the destructive elements of sin and death into God's good creation and spills over into the relationship of man and woman.

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." 11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" 12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." 13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." -Genesis 3:1-13

The text of Genesis 2 is very explicit about the fact that Adam received God's command to not eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil **prior** to the creation of the woman. In light of this, it is very interesting that the Serpent chooses specifically to approach Eve with the temptation to eat from the tree. Why would the Serpent do such a thing? It would seem that the answer is that it undermines God's structure of authority in the world by undermining the order of the man and woman's relationship. In the light of later revelation⁸, we understand that the Serpent is Satan; a name which means "adversary". As God's adversary, his natural tendency is to oppose and undermine God's work and his created order.

As God addresses the man, woman, and serpent after the rebellion, he rights the order that the Serpent had undermined in the temptation. Even though the woman had initially spoken with the serpent and ate the fruit of the tree, God addresses Adam first to honor the created order of things. Even though Eve was deceived and ate first, Adam was held responsible because God gave him the command to not eat and he passively stood by and did nothing.

In the continuing account, we find out how this rebellion affects the serpent, the woman, the man, and creation. They are each affected in accordance with their unique roles.

⁶ While headship language is not present in this passage, it seems clear that the concept is in play here. To assume because headship language isn't employed that headship isn't in view here would be to commit the word-concept fallacy.

⁷ 1 Cor. 11:3, 8. The issue of the nature of authority within headship will be discussed more fully in the context of 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and Eph. 5:22-33.

⁸ Particularly Rev. 12:9 & 20:2

14 The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." 16 To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." 17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." -Genesis 3:14-19

God addresses both the man and the woman after their rebellion and calls into effect the curses for sin. To the woman, God pronounces three consequences for her sin. First, she will experience increased pain in childbearing. Secondly, her desire will be for her husband. This doesn't mean that a wife would be sexually attracted to her husband nor does it mean that a woman would be naturally prone to submit to a man's domineering rule. The word for desire (תִּשְׁוָאָה, *tēšūqāh*) is the same word used just verses later in Gen. 4:7 when God warns Cain that sin's desire (תִּשְׁוָאָה) is for him but he must rule over it. The sense in Gen. 4:7 is that sin wants to overpower and overcome Cain. In light of the similarity of usage, it seems that what God is telling the woman is that her desire would be to overpower the man and so usurp God's natural ordering of things. Lastly, God tells the woman that her husband would rule over her. In light of the fact that this is pronounced over the woman as a curse, it doesn't seem like it refers to the natural ordering of headship that God had built into the created order. Rather, it seems to indicate that man would sinfully want to exercise a domineering rule over the woman, not the servant leadership that God intended for the man.

Next, God addressed the man and his sin. Adam's rebellion consisted of his listening to his wife and eating the fruit of the tree. Clearly, God is not telling Adam that listening to one's wife is wrong. However, passively listening so as to submit to her leadership and follow it so as to disobey God seems to be what is intended here. Essentially, Adam failed to lead and protect his wife spiritually here and didn't stand against the lies of the serpent. As a consequence, his work, the subduing and having dominion over the creation, would become much more difficult because the natural order of things had been corrupted.

In this part of the Story, God foretells of a time when the woman's offspring, a man, will bruise the serpent's head (some versions say 'crush his head'). This is a preview of how the second 'Adam', Jesus, will not stand by passively, but will stand up and defeat the enemy on behalf of his bride.

Marriage, Looking Forward, and Looking Back

Following Adam and Eve's rebellion and the ongoing rebellion of humanity, God calls a man, Abraham. He promises to make him fruitful in his old age and produce through him a nation so large, it can't be counted. God also promised through Abraham's offspring all the world would be blessed. This nation is Israel and this offspring is Jesus.

God made a covenant with Israel and Israel agreed to be faithful to their part of the covenant⁹. It was very much like a wedding ceremony. Throughout the story, God refers to Israel as his bride. However, she is not a faithful bride. She is an adulterous bride, giving herself to other gods, failing to keep her part of the covenant, while God remains a faithful husband, remaining true to his covenant vows. He goes to great lengths to rescue his bride and take her back over and over

⁹ Exodus 19:1-9a, 20:1-21

again¹⁰. The metaphor of marriage is a picture of the grand narrative of God's faithful, never-ending, pursuing love for his bride. Ultimately, God will pay the greatest price for his bride both to make her a clean, beautiful bride and to make her fully and faithfully his own. Jesus is the price he is willing to pay. And it is this story that informs what marriage is all about or rather human marriage is an imperfect picture of this grand love story.

3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. -1 Corinthians 11:3

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. -Ephesians 5:22-33

Excursus on Headship

The common theme that binds both 1 Cor. 11 and Eph. 5 together is headship. Much debate has surrounded the concept of headship in the New Testament. On the egalitarian side, scholars have argued that head primarily denotes "source" while on the complementarian side, proponents have argued that head (κεφαλή, *kephalē*) primarily means "authority". The debate between these two positions has been deadlocked for nearly the last 30 years. However, other scholars have argued that neither "source" nor "authority" are the best explanation for the "head" metaphor in Paul's writings. Rather, we should understand "head" in the normal sense as the head of a body, a metaphor that indicates the unity of head and body in a one-flesh relationship.¹¹ While this last position makes good sense of the text of scripture, particularly in Ephesians, we believe that the full significance of *kephalē* goes beyond the mere head/body analogy.

In his New Testament writings, Paul uses *kephalē* 13 times. In only two of these instances does *kephalē* refer to a literal head. In each of the remaining 11 occurrences, Paul uses the term in reference to the metaphor of head and body (σῶμα, *sōma*) where the metaphor speaks either of Jesus as head of the church which is his body or the man as the head of the wife in a way that reflects Jesus' relationship to his church. In the context of Paul's thought, this head/body metaphor points to a greater theological reality that theologians have explained as covenantal union and federal headship. Union with Christ is a central concept for Paul's thought¹² and is particularly present in Ephesians where Paul is constantly referencing our position "in Christ" and how all the benefits of the gospel flow to us because we are now "in Christ". The reason this is possible is because Jesus is our federal head. J.P. Baker describes the concept this way in the IVP Dictionary of Theology:

¹⁰ The prophetic performance of Hosea is designed to image God's relentless pursuit of his faithless bride, Israel.

¹¹ For a representative sampling see: Sara Sumner, *Men and Women in the Church: Building Consensus on Christian Leadership* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2003), 139-153.

¹² See J. Todd Billings, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011). and James S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ: The Vital Elements of St. Paul's Religion* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1935).

“The way in which men and women are dealt with by God ‘in Christ’ is seen to parallel his dealings with mankind ‘in Adam’. He deals with the many through a representative man (or ‘federal head’) in each case, imputing Adam’s sin to his descendants and Christ’s obedience and atonement to his followers (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49), with all that flows from that in both cases. This is part of the meaning of a person’s being ‘in Christ’, or of his union with him. The basis for God’s dealing with his people on this representative footing is seen to have been laid in his dealings with humanity in Adam from the first.”¹³

Now, this way of understanding headship implies that *kephalē* carries the meaning of “source”; Adam was the source of humanity just as Jesus is the source of the new humanity¹⁴. It also includes the idea of authority which seems to be clearly present in Col. 2:10, a verse which includes the same “in Christ” language which indicates the presence of Union with Christ Theology.

So to summarize, the head/body analogy which is present especially in 1 Cor. 11 and Eph. 5 is meant to refer to the representative nature of headship whereby the head represents the body and vice-versa. This understanding makes room for the idea of head as source, as in the example of Adam who was the head of the human race, the one from whom every human being is physically descended. Head as representation also includes the idea of authority, as in the example of David who, as King, was the representative head of Israel and obviously in a role of authority with respect to the nation as a whole.

Returning to the context of God’s story, what can we say that wives are called to do in light of The Story? Big picture, they are called to submit to Jesus and his re-ordering of the creation by playing the part woman was originally created to play. In the context of the home this means to submit to and respect their husbands. Note that submit here doesn’t mean to be put oneself in a position so as to be trampled and marginalized. In context of the story, it means to show honorable deference to the husband. The reason for this submission given in Eph 5:22-23 is ultimately because of Jesus. The wife is called to submit to her husband the way she is called to submit to Jesus. In this, wives are displaying a picture of the Church and its submission to Christ as well as Christ’s submission to God the Father in everything. So the ultimate submission in the life of a woman is to Jesus, his mission and his story. Through her life of submission to her husband, she is turning from telling her story to telling God’s big love story.

If the wife’s submission to the husband reflects the right re-ordering of the creation under Jesus, then what role do husbands play in Jesus’ story? Immediately as Paul turns to address husbands in Eph 5:25, he informs them that their role as head over the wife calls them to love their wives *in the same way* that Christ exercised his role as head over the church, by sacrificially giving up his own life for her. The implication of this is that the husband would nourish and cherish his wife the way he would his own body because in the covenantal union of marriage, the wife is the body of the husband the same way the Church is the body of Jesus. In this loving, sacrificial service, the husband images Christ’s love for and commitment to the Church by setting his wife apart from all others and committing himself to her ongoing growth and beautification.

Every marriage in the Lord is meant to 1) look backward at what Jesus has done for us by serving us to the point of death on a cross for our sins to make us his holy people set apart for him alone and 2) look forward to the day when Jesus will return to take his bride to be his own, purified and made ready for that wedding day when we will be united perfectly to Jesus Christ.

Our marriage ultimately is not for us but for him, to tell His Story, to be a display of what the Gospel of Jesus Christ looks like in our relationships.

¹³ J.P. Baker, “Union with Christ” in *New Dictionary of Theology* (eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 698.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 15:21-23 & Col. 2:19

To sum up the roles of men and women in marriage, we could say that:

1. A Husband is a Servant Leader called to Sacrificial Love – a strong and tender man
2. A Wife is a Suitable Helper called to Respectful Deference – an empowering and encouraging women

Excursus on Authority in God's Kingdom

Understanding the role of husbands and wives in this way calls for a brief clarification on how we see the nature of authority in God's Kingdom. Suggesting that man's headship over his wife implies his authority over her is an extremely unpopular idea in the context of the late-modern West where we have become increasingly suspicious of authority. Indeed, post-modern theory has exposed any human ideology for what it ultimately is, a power grab designed to legitimize and consolidate power in the hands of a few. One of the clearest and most distinct discussions of authority in God's economy occurs in Mark 10. James and John have just come to Jesus requesting that they receive the two highest places of honor in Jesus' kingdom, believing that in just a few days they will march into Jerusalem, overthrow the Roman rule, and re-establish the political Kingdom of Israel. The ten other disciples become indignant at James and John thinking that their shot at power was just sneakily undermined. Jesus turns to all of them and replies:

[42] "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. [43] But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, [44] and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. [45] For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." **-Mark 10:41-45**

The power dynamics of Jesus' Kingdom are the exact opposite of those of the world. While the world uses power to oppress and gain an advantage for oneself or one's group, those who have power and authority in the Kingdom of God use it and express it through sacrificial service. The sad reality is for too long, many in the Church have used the Bible's teaching about roles and headship to legitimate a Patriarchal system that delegitimizes and marginalizes women, both in the home and in the church. Let us be clear that such actions are sinful and not in line with the truth of the Gospel or the dynamics of God's Kingdom. When Paul tells husbands that they exercise headship over their wives by sacrificially serving them even to the point of death, this presents a model of authority that wives would have a hard time not wanting to submit to.

The Church

Now, how does all of this talk of men and women, the Story of God and our unique roles in that story affect what we do as the Church? God's intent is that the Church, the bride of Christ, becomes fully what he meant her to be. She is to be sanctified, which means, "set apart" for his purposes. His purpose in saving her was to glorify God in all things¹⁵ by fulfilling his mission of making disciples who submit to Jesus in everything¹⁶.

Jesus died to forgive us and cleanse us of our sins, making us a holy people. He was raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit overcoming sin, Satan, and death and showing that his death was sufficient to pay the debt of sin, satisfying God's wrath for us. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead has given new life and power to all those who belong to Christ, enabling them to live a new life¹⁷. The Church received the Spirit at Pentecost. Those who loved and followed Jesus had been instructed to wait until they received power from the Holy Spirit to be his witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, and to the ends of the earth. Jesus had previously taught them that the same Spirit that enabled him to be empowered for God's mission would be given to them

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:8-10

¹⁶ Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁷ Romans 8:

to enable them to do the same kind of work that Jesus did. About 120 men and women were gathering together to pray and wait, and on Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit came.

1 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. 6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." 12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13 But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine." 14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. 15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. 16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: 17 "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; 18 even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. 19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; 20 the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. 21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." -Acts 2:1-21

Peter goes on to describe how this is all possible because of what Jesus had accomplished and that all those who believe, repent, and are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins will also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. About 3,000 additional souls were added to the Church that day.

Now, what happened to those Christians who were filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost? Luke tells us that they were empowered to speak about the mighty works of God in such a way that people of different languages could understand them. The crowd around them, made up mostly of Jews, was skeptical of these strange events. However, Peter tells them that this strange scene is actually the eschatological fulfillment of God's promises to his people through the prophet Joel and proceeds to quote from Joel 2:28-32. Joel's prophecy indicates that 1) the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh 2) Male and female alike would prophesy and 3) young men would see visions and old men would dream dreams.¹⁸

This prophecy in Joel is itself a reflection of an earlier desire expressed by Moses in the book of Numbers. In Numbers 11, elders are appointed to aid Moses in his task of leading God's people. As the elders are appointed, the Spirit comes to rest on them and they begin to prophesy. Some of the people are unnerved by this and ask Moses to make them stop, to which he replies, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"¹⁹ We see then that there was a clear desire to see the prophetic ministry become normative among God's

¹⁸ This doesn't mean only men would see visions and dream dreams – this is an indication of how the Spirit will work through men and women, young and old in a variety of ways.

¹⁹ Num. 11:29

people. Under the guidance of the Spirit, Joel picks up on this and foretells that in the age when God returns to restore his people and the world, all God's people would have the privilege of ministering under the influence of the Spirit of Prophecy.

The upshot of this is that once the eschatological age dawns, the entire people of God, men and women, young and old, anyone who has the Spirit occupies a new revelatory vantage point. This qualifies them to prophesy and speak of and for God in all of life because of the work of the Spirit in them. So, each of these classes of people, men and women, young and old, are able and encouraged to do ministry as a part of God's eschatological people, the Church.

Luke goes on to describe what the life of the church looked like as they all participated in ministry...

42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. -Acts 2:42-47

The church's ministry and mission was an everyday work and everyone was involved. This is the nature of the ministry of the church – all people, young and old, male and female, every race – all changed by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and every one of them filled and empowered by the Spirit for the mission of God in everyday life.

Much of the discussion about the ministry of the church in our day centers around what paid professionals do in a one or two hour gathering on Sunday, thus limiting the discussion significantly regarding who gets to do ministry. The church of Jesus does gather and should do it regularly²⁰, however the church is the people of God. Church is not an event. The Church is a people – a people saved by God's power for God's purpose in the everyday.²¹

At Soma, we believe we are the church in all of life and that all of life is to be lived for the glory of God and the accomplishing of Jesus' mission. We regularly spend time together in homes, over meals, serving our community, and celebrating life. As a result, we have countless opportunities for ministry for all ages, men and women, employing every gift, talent, and ability. Ministry is any kind of service to one another where someone is led to Jesus, loved by his people and built up in their faith.²² You can see how everyone has a significant role to play when we see the church differently!

Church Ministry Roles

Some may still be asking, but what about leadership roles within the church? Are there any restrictions? And, when we do gather in a larger setting, what kinds of opportunities are available for men and women?

In order to properly address these questions, we need to keep several key thoughts in mind:

1. The church is the household (οἶκος, *oikos*) of God and as such is a family of families.
2. The way the church operates should be consistent with God's intent for the household.
3. The church is responsible to both proclaim and show the story of God in what she says and how she operates.

²⁰ Heb. 10:24-25

²¹ Rom. 1:16-17; Eph. 2:8-10

²² Eph. 4:11-16

The dominant metaphor for the gospel story is the marriage; the union between a husband and a wife is a picture of the union of Christ and the Church²³. Furthermore, the dominant metaphor for the nature of God's people is the family²⁴. God's intent for his family (*oikos*) is to tell his Story through both the love of a husband for his wife and a father for his children.

The Church is the household of God. It is a Family of families. The Church is not a business that families attend. The instructions on headship and authority in the home are not abolished as the church organizes, but rather upheld and demonstrated both in the structures of the church and in the churches gathering because the church is called to instruct and model God's intent for the family.

All this sets us up to properly understand what Paul is saying in one of the most debated and contentious passages in all of scripture.

2:11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. -1 Timothy 2:11-15

Many interpretations of this passage have been undertaken without a full view of how v. 12 fits into the context and flow of Paul's letter to Timothy. It has often been argued that in this passage, Paul is responding to a local issue in the church at Ephesus rather than laying down a universal rule for the Church. However, this doesn't seem to fit the context of the passage. We should recognize that vs. 8-15 form one section (pericope) in which Paul is laying down guidelines for appropriate behavior when the church gathers together. In v. 8, Paul addresses men saying that he wants men *in every place*²⁵ to pray.... In light of parallelism between men and women in this passage, it seems best to understand Paul's instructions to women in vs. 9-15 to be similarly universal in scope.

A second observation about the context of v. 12 has to do with the thrust of Paul's commands. As N.T. Wright has noted, "The key to the present passage, then, is to recognize that it is commanding that women, too, should be allowed to study and learn, and should not be restrained from doing so (verse 11)."²⁶ While women studying and learning was not absolutely unheard of at the time, there was a dominant male prejudice against women learning.²⁷ Paul's liberation of women to study the scriptures and learn Christian doctrine is significant in that it restores women in the church to their proper created identity as image bearers of God, welcomed and encouraged to learn the mighty works of God alongside men.

As is often the case, whenever a change in culture is made, there is a tendency to overcorrect and so Paul qualifies his statements about freeing women to learn in order to ensure that the proper creational order is maintained. First, he says that they must learn quietly (*ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ*). This does not mean that women must remain silent in the gathering or even that they must whisper, rather this phrase means something more along the lines of "without causing disturbance".²⁸

Paul then goes on to further explain what he means by women learning without causing disturbance in v. 12 where he says that he "does not permit a woman to teach or have authority

²³ Eph. 5:22-33

²⁴ Eph. 1:3-14; 2:19; Actually, almost every New Testament book uses family language when referring to the church

²⁵ For other examples of the Greek phrase *ἐν παντί τόπω* in Paul which indicate his universal intention in this phrase, see 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14; 1 Th 1:8.

²⁶ N.T. Wright, "Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis" (paper presented at the Symposium 'Men, Women and the Church, St. John's College, Durham, September 4, 2004), 10.

²⁷ For an example, see Juvenal, *Satires* 6:434-456.

²⁸ See Paul's only other usage of *ἡσυχία* (*hēsychia*) in 2 Th 3:12.

over a man". Since this is perhaps the most significant prohibition towards women in the New Testament, it's important to understand what Paul is and is not saying. The same grammatical construction that makes up "to teach or have authority over" is found in Acts 16:21.²⁹ There, the two verbs linked by "or" (οὐδέ, oude) show a clear relationship; they are to be understood together while not equating them. This leads to the conclusion that "teaching" and "having authority" in 1 Tim 2:12 are to be understood together and not separate. Now, what do they mean together? To answer this question, we must look further on in 1 Tim. 3. When Paul originally wrote this letter, there were no verse and chapter divisions such as we have in our modern translations. In the flow of the letter, ch. 3 naturally connects with what Paul has been saying in 2:8-15. It is only our modern chapter divisions that keep us from fully appreciating the flow of Paul's thought here.

3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. -1 Timothy 3:1-7

Paul tells Timothy that an elder must have two skills: 1) he must be able to teach and 2) he must manage (lead) his own household well so he can also lead the church. An elder must first show competence in teaching and exercising authority over his own household before he is able to teach and lead God's household in the office of an elder. These two skills are exactly what Paul is referring to back in 2:12. Thus it would seem that Paul is not permitting a woman to hold the office of elder in the church along with its function of instructing the church in apostolic doctrine.

Paul grounds this instruction on men and women in the church in the Creation account and the order that God established there. In light of the Church's role as the community which is called to give a preview of God's restoration of all things, this prohibition is designed to demonstrate God's design for marriage in the public gathering (Adam was supposed to take leadership and authority in the situation, but did not – Adam was passive and Eve took the lead).³⁰ As men and women do this in the gathered church, they also are pictures of the story of the church's submission to Christ and Christ's submission to God the Father.

This passage makes it clear that only qualified males may serve in the office of elder/overseer of the church. This is consistent with the order God set up for the household. The husband is the head of his wife and is charged to lovingly lead his home as a servant leader. The ones who are qualified to spiritually oversee the church are those who are faithful in overseeing their homes – faithful, skilled godly husbands and fathers.³¹ As a result of following this standard Paul puts forth, we will give an example to the whole church of what spiritual leadership looks like in the home. The church must provide the example so men and women know what to expect in the home.

Does this mean women are not to lead in the church?

²⁹ Infinitive + οὐδέ + Infinitive. This exact collocation appears in Acts 16:21. While not Pauline, it's still significant as a piece of evidence towards understanding the meaning of the construction. For similar collocations in 1 Tim see: 1 Tim 2:4, 5:4, 5:14 and especially 6:17.

³⁰ This is not making the point that women are more easily deceived than men, but rather how the order of headship was undermined.

³¹ Does this disqualify single men or childless men? Not necessarily, if a single man is called to singleness. If a single man does not have evidence of spiritually leading "children" in the faith, he may need to grow more. If he desires to be married, he may need to put his energies into pursuing a wife. In some cases, single men do not have the character or ability to spiritually lead a woman/wife and the pursuit of a wife may be what is necessary to grow them into an effective elder someday. "If a man cannot convince one woman to follow his lead, why should we ask the whole church to submit to him?"

8 In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. 11 In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. 12 A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. 13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. -1 Timothy 3:8-13

The word *deacons* refers here to Christian servants designated to partner with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways.³² It is apparent from this passage (vs. 11) as well as Romans 16:1 that both women and men may serve in this role. The work that a deacon fulfills can be as varied as the ministry needs within the local church. The key qualifier is that the deacons exist to serve the body under the authority of the elders.

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...
-Ephesians 4:11-12

This passage in Ephesians outlines five paradigmatic gifts that Jesus gives to his church.³³ These have often been called the Five-Fold Ministry of the church and are significant giftings that must be present in the life of the body in order for her to grow up to maturity in Christ. Each gifting along with our understanding of it is outlined below:

1. Apostles (Missionary) – Sent to establish new gospel work and re-catalyze or repair old works
2. Prophets – Call the church back to faithful obedience to God’s word (often in regards to justice and mercy) and call people forward to what the Spirit is saying to a particular person or group
3. Evangelists (Herald of the Gospel) – Recruit people to follow Jesus by powerfully sharing the good news (gospel) about Jesus
4. Shepherds – Care for and build up the people of God
5. Teachers – Instruct for obedience to God’s word³⁴

We should note that this passage in Ephesians does not provide any restrictions on who can exercise these giftings in the life of the church. In fact, as we read through the rest of the New Testament, we often see both men and women exercising these giftings for the Church.

*1 I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me. 3 Greet **Priscilla** and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. 6 Greet **Mary**, who worked very hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, whose fidelity to Christ has stood the test. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. 11 Greet Herodion, my fellow Jew.*

³² See also Phil. 1:1

³³ Many commentators have traditionally seen these five gifts as offices of the church. We would disagree with this interpretation in light of the fact that Paul describes them specifically as “gifts” in Eph. 4:7+8.

³⁴ For a fuller treatment of the Five-Fold Ministry, see Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

*Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.12 Greet **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, those women who work hard in the Lord. Greet my dear friend **Persis**, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and **his mother**, who has been a mother to me, too.14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the other brothers and sisters with them.15 Greet Philologus, **Julia**, Nereus and his **sister**, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them. -Romans 16:1-15³⁵*

This passage seems significant for this discussion because at least 10 out of the 28 ministry companions that Paul mentions here are women. What roles did they play?

1. **Phoebe** – a deacon of the church in Cenchreae, a financial supporter for Paul and others, and possibly the deliverer of Paul's letter to the Romans
2. **Priscilla** – Co-worker (along with her husband) of Paul. She and her husband also played a key role in teaching Apollos the way of God more fully to him (Acts 18:26).³⁶
3. **Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa** and **Persis**, all of whom were said to be hard workers in the Lord
4. **Junia** – who, along with her husband Andronicus, was outstanding among the apostles (They were not the original apostolate³⁷, but missionaries sent out)
5. **Rufus' Mother** – who was like a mother to Paul, probably referring to how an older women cares for younger adults and very possibly gave wise counsel and instruction to Paul (like mothers do)

We have examples of females as: 1) apostles, 2) prophets, 3) evangelists and 4) teachers. We don't have any clear examples of female shepherds or male shepherds for that matter (other than Jesus Christ, the Chief Shepherd). Elders are called to shepherd the flock, but are not called shepherds in the text. Some would say that Shepherd/Teacher are actually one role with two descriptions. It's interesting that the word Shepherd is the word for Pastor, but it is the least used in the New Testament as a role or title. Yet, we use this title to address spiritual leaders in the church more than any other. Much of the discussion about Women in Ministry gets mired up in the question: "Can a woman be a pastor?" Maybe we should change the question: "Can a woman be a shepherd?" Or maybe we need to get rid of the title "Pastor" and connect it more to a role and not a position. It seems the clear positions or offices that leaders are appointed to in the church are elder and deacon. The rest seem to be roles or giftings and not offices.

As far as the offices, only men can occupy the office of elder. Men and women can occupy the office of deacon. And it seems men and women are able to equip the body as apostles (missionaries), prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors) and teachers.

Ministry in the Gatherings

Now that we've established that the majority of the ministry of the church happens outside the gathering and is executed by the whole body working together, not just elders or even elders and deacons; we're ready to examine the role of women in the Gathered Church. A key text for how women function in the gathering is 1 Cor. 11:1-16.

1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. 2 I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. 3 But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. 6 For if a

³⁵ Quoted from the NIV translation

³⁶ Priscilla's name is before her husband in this list, she must have been a very capable woman. It would seem that Priscilla was an evangelist or teacher in light of the term co-worker and the activity of instructing Apollos. Though we cannot be certain on this.

³⁷ The original 12 disciples who signified the complete restoration of Israel in Jesus and his people.

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, then she should cover her head. 7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, 15 but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. 16 If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God. -1 Corinthians 11:1-16

In 1 Corinthians 11, the means of honoring headship was through a head covering which was used to cover the glory one's head represented. In the case of a man, his head represented Christ. So, he was to have his head uncovered when praying or prophesying in order to show that he wanted Christ to be glorified, not himself. In the case of a woman, her head represented the glory of man. So, she was to have her head covered so that not man but Christ was glorified in her praying or prophesying. In each case, they acknowledged they agreed with and submitted to the created order and that they wanted the glory to be on Christ and not on humanity. N.T. Wright helpfully summarizes this point saying:

The underlying point then seems to be that in worship it is important for both men and women to be their truly created selves, to honour God by being what they are and not blurring the lines by pretending to be something else. One of the unspoken clues to this passage may be Paul's assumption that in worship the creation is being restored, or perhaps that in worship we are anticipating its eventual restoration (15.27–28). God made humans male and female, and gave them 'authority' over the world.... And if humans are to reclaim this authority over the world, this will come about as they worship the true God, as they pray and prophesy in his name, and are renewed in his image, in being what they were made to be, in celebrating the genders God has given them.³⁸

We no longer use a physical head covering as a sign of authority or submission, but we must still make every effort to both affirm the order of headship in our public gatherings and insure that Christ is exalted, not man³⁹.

Since the context of each Soma Church differs from city to city, we don't believe we can offer hard and fast guidelines on how this should look in every location. We do think, however, that each church needs to examine themselves in light of the following three questions:

1. What are some means in our culture today where we can publicly affirm our submission to God's created order (the head of the man is Christ, the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God)?
2. How have we operated in ways that does not affirm God's created order? How do we need to repent and change?
3. How can we insure that Christ is exalted above humanity through our worship and ministry? How can we better tell His Story in all we do?

One last passage is also worth exploring as we seek to understand the New Testament teaching on women's roles in the gathered church, 1 Cor 14:26-40.

³⁸ Wright, "Women's Service," 8.

³⁹ For more info, listen to Jeff Vanderstelt's message on 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 on May 27, 2012

26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord’s people. 34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 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. 36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

-1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Vs. 34-35 in particular⁴⁰ have caused a lot of confusion among commentators. As always, it’s helpful to examine the context around debated verses to help get a sense of perspective. Paul has been discussing the orderly use of the spiritual gifts in the gathered church. In v. 26 Paul lists several things that the body, presumable both men and women, can contribute for the edification of the gathered church:

1. A Hymn – Songs
2. A Word of Instruction – Teaching
3. A Revelation – Prophecy
4. A Tongue or Interpretation – Prophecy, Evangelism, Teaching or Shepherding

If women are called to participate in all of these ways, what does Paul mean by saying “Women are to remain silent? It is important to notice what Paul is largely addressing in this text – he is addressing prophecy and how to weigh it. In fact, the specific command to “be silent” (σιγάω, sigáo) is used two other times in the immediate context⁴¹ to describe what one should do if either there is no interpreter for a word in a tongue or if someone else stands up to interpret the tongue. If this text is continuing the dialog regarding prophecy and who should weigh what is said authoritatively, it seems that Paul is not absolutely silencing women in the church gathering, since he would be contradicting what he said about women prophesying earlier.

Rather, he is saying that they are not to weigh in on the interpretation of a tongue or prophecy.⁴² He is calling them to remain in quiet submission to the elders who will weigh in on whether a prophecy is in line with God’s word – as elders are called to refute false teaching/doctrine.

The other possibility, which I am now more inclined to believe is that Paul is restricting woman from engaging in a public interrogation of another woman’s husband. The reason for this conclusion is connected to the motivation given in verse 35 – *If there is anything they desire to*

⁴⁰ It’s worth mentioning here that a few key manuscripts in the Western Textual Tradition transpose vs. 34-35 and place them directly after v. 40. This has led some scholars, most notably Gordon Fee, to argue that they are not original to 1 Corinthians and are an interpolation that was added later by a scribe. We believe these verses should be taken as original to Paul’s letter as they have the support of some of the best and earliest Greek manuscripts available.

⁴¹ 1 Cor 14:28+30

⁴² Scholars are divided on what events going on in Corinth may have necessitated Paul’s command here. In light of the occasional nature of 1 Corinthians, we can surmise that there was likely a situation that precipitated this command; for suggestions see N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 196-201.

learn. Yet, what is so wrong with a desire to learn? That's where the other part comes in – *Paul says it is shameful to do so in the public gathering*. Do what? It would seem that there is an extended dialog going on between a woman seeking ongoing learning in a public setting through the interrogation of another woman's husband.

Christopher Forbes says that "there existed in the Graeco-Roman world in [the first century] . . . a strong prejudice against women speaking in public, and especially against their speaking to other women's husbands. In a society with strictly defined gender and social roles, and a strong view of the rights of the man over his wife, such behaviour was treated as totally inappropriate" (274-5) and "to ask questions of the husbands of other women (especially as this might lead to extended discussions) would be grossly improper, and as such is not to be permitted" (276).

This might explain Paul's prohibition here. With that said, if that was the case, one could argue that we no longer consider that a shameful practice and thus Paul's prohibition of women speaking in public is no longer applicable.⁴³

In conclusion, the only restriction for women in the church is the office of elder as it is the means by which the church provides oversight that sets the example of headship in the home and gives a picture of Jesus as head of the church, whom he loving serves through his life and death. The other provision is that all ministries done by women should honor the men as the head of the wife and as an example of headship for the church.

Each of our Soma churches has the responsibility to determine how to publicly demonstrate that they honor God's order and the freedom to do it in cultural forms that communicate God's order clearly to their culture. Some of our churches may be led to only team-teach with men and women together (similar to what we see with Priscilla and Aquilla, and Andronicus and Junia), while others may use a verbal clarification prior to a women speaking to uphold God's order.

It would seem that it is the responsibility of the local elders to determine what kind of teaching is the responsibility of an elder and which is open for others. It would seem that any authoritative setting forth of the church's doctrine is reserved for the elders. And any teaching that instructs on how to practically apply the churches' doctrine is open to all qualified teachers, men and women, so long as proper order and submission is in place. Thus, when planting a church, the founding elder or elders, should do the authoritative teaching, which serves to lay the foundational, authoritative doctrines of the church.

Remember, God created us male and female, equal image bearers, with different roles, to show what he is like and to tell His Story of redeeming, sacrificial love. This story is not about us. It is about him. Let's play our parts well in telling the world the Story of God with both the voices and gifts of men and women image bearers released for ministry.

⁴³ For more on this consult Sam Storms article from which I drew this concept: <http://www.samstorms.com/all-articles/post/interpretation-of-tongues--judging-prophetic-words---and-women--1-corinthians-14:26-40->