



**ECO**

A Covenant Order  
of Evangelical  
Presbyterians

# Gender in Christ Theology and Resources

2020 PREVIEW edition

Gender in Christ—Theology and Resources

ECO Theology Series

Standing Theology Committee

PREVIEW EDITION

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## Introduction to ECO Theology Series

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” — Romans 12:2

“Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the ongoing project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.” (ECO Essential Tenets III.D).

ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians is committed to the renewal of our minds in the twenty-first century. This century is unprecedented in the church’s history. Christianity is moving from its historical centers in European countries and those places Europeans settled, to countries of the global south. Churches do not enjoy the same power in the secular arena they did in ages past. Secular humanism, the rise and dominance of a technological environment, and mass globalization have transformed the way Christians have to think. These are the patterns of the world. They are facts on the ground. But this is a radically different world than that of Jesus’s time, the time of Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, the high middle ages, the Reformation, or even of the period of revivalism. Although our theological traditions have equipped us in some ways, we need to confront our new world head-on, understand it, and seek to bring the message of the reconciliation of all things in Christ to this world. To do that, we must have our minds renewed.

This series of books is designed to equip you in the process of having your mind renewed. This renewal is never easy. It requires that we analyze the normal patterns of thinking around us. We have to reevaluate our traditional beliefs according to the Word of God. We have to ask where our forebears have been blind in the past due to their cultural situation, and discern how we might be blinded by our own cultural beliefs. With confidence in beliefs that are thoroughly rooted in the Word of God that are communicable to the people of this present evil age, we can shine the light of the kingdom of God to a dark and dying world.

We have hope: hope in the kingdom of God, hope in the resurrection of the dead, hope in the renewal of all creation. We are a people of hope with a message of hope. But we must be able to communicate that hope. These books aim to equip you to explain the hope that is within you (1 Peter 3:15).

## Gender in Christ Introduction

The question of the ordination of women is deceptively complex. While it may seem like a simple yes or no answer with direct proof-texts from the Bible, the issue involves many complexities. We must remember that the Reformers who proclaimed *sola Scriptura* never meant that Scripture was intended to be alone as the only source for theological questions. They simply meant that it was the highest authority. All the Reformers saw earlier theologians as important figures. They lived as people of their own times. Some appealed to nature as they then understood it.

The ordination of women involves questions about how we read the Bible. Can we simply refer to proof-texts like Paul's infamous statement, "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12, ESV)? Is this alone enough to dictate theology and polity? Or is it possible that a surface level reading of English translations misleads us by inviting us to import our anachronistic cultural presuppositions into an ancient and foreign text? Should we try to understand Paul's theology as a whole before we turn to his application texts? Does the Bible have a coherent direction from creation through the rebellion of sin, to the kingdom of God come in Jesus, and its fullness in a new creation?

Then, if we are satisfied that the Bible supports the question of women in leadership, we have to ask "what does it mean to 'ordain' a woman?" Questions of ecclesiology are vital here. Is ordination a legitimate New Testament practice or does it bear all the signs of a later re-paganization of Christianity with a reintroduction of human priests and sacrifices? Should there be a clergy/laity divide that allows women every opportunity except for joining the clergy, as some assert?

And what about outside of the church? What does it mean to be male and female according to the Bible? Is this a vital distinction of God's creation? Has God established eternal gender roles and jobs? Or has Judaism and Christianity only inhabited certain cultural environments in which more "traditional" gender roles made sense, until modernity came along?

And once we begin to ask the question of gender roles, we must, of course, encounter questions of how gender relates to sex, and from there, to marriage and the family. What does Christian marriage mean? Why does Paul think that singleness is superior? What about homosexuality? Transgenderism? Intersex?

Hermeneutics, theological anthropology, cultural exegesis, biblical theology, systematic theology, ecclesiology, gender studies, sociology, theology of the family... all of these fields and more are implicated in the simple question, "Why does ECO ordain women?"

This book is a *preview edition* of a much larger task of engaging these questions in a rigorously biblical and Reformed way. Thinking through all of these issues will take quite some time and thought. This book is intended to provide you with some of the big questions to ask and direction of how to begin answering these questions.

Views expressed in each of these articles represent the views of their authors. Although written by members of ECO's Standing Theology Committee, these articles do not represent official denominational perspectives.

## Part I: Backgrounds and Sources—Bible, Culture, Environment



# Understanding the Bible

Rev. Dr. Laura A. Smit

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.  
Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.  
Jeremiah 15:16

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.  
Hebrews 4:12

Christians often speak about the *perspicuity* of the Bible, meaning that the Bible is lucid and clear, not cloudy or misleading. But this is not always our experience of reading the Bible. Sometimes it seems extremely confusing. I have had church members tell me that they no longer read the Bible because their pastor has led them to believe that it can only be understood by those who have extensive knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and the ancient world. I have had students tell me that they no longer expect to find any practical moral guidance in the Bible because it seems to them that the Bible can be made to say whatever a person wants it to say and that its meaning keeps changing. For many people, the idea that the Bible is the chief source of Christian theology is not helpful but discouraging.

Reading the Bible regularly, thoughtfully, and extensively is the best way to start loving the Bible. There is a grand narrative in the Bible that is compelling once you get a glimpse of it. There are patterns that recur, with each instance being illumined by all the others. There is a whole system of symbols based on the assumption that the everyday things in our world are pointers to realities in the God's kingdom. There is an understanding of the world as vast and wild, charged with supernatural power and mystery.

Even so, it is certainly true that Christians do not always agree about the right application of Biblical teaching. The Bible itself acknowledges this. The apostle Paul spends a great deal of time in his first letter to the Corinthians dealing with the fact that some members of the church in Corinth think that they clearly must never eat meat that

has been dedicated to an idol, since that would be a betrayal of their faith, whereas other members of the same church think that since idols aren't real beings such dedication is meaningless and needn't be taken into account when they are shopping for their dinner. Both groups were intent on being obedient, even if that obedience was costly, uncomfortable, or inconvenient. They were not simply bending the teachings of Jesus or the Hebrew Bible to fit their personal preferences. And yet they did not understand those teachings in the same way.<sup>1</sup> Paul requires members on both sides to follow their consciences about eating or not-eating meat; in fact, he says that they would be sinning *not* to follow their consciences. But his emphasis is on extending grace to each other, since this was a non-essential matter.

Paul is not always so gracious. There are times when he writes to the church in Corinth and chastises them for ignoring clear teaching on matters that he does not consider at all obscure, such as sexual morality. There are some topics that require carefully sorting different Biblical teaching that may seem contradictory, but there are other topics on which the Bible is remarkably consistent. The more you read the Bible (and not just your favorite parts, but the whole Bible), the more easily you will be able to know whether you are dealing with a very clear teaching or something that seems to change depending on context.

When the Bible's teaching is not clear to you, the first question to ask is how central the question you're investigating is to the Bible's message. The Westminster Confession says,

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (1.7).

Is the issue that you are investigating necessary for Christian faith and life? The more central the issue, the less room for disagreement. The more peripheral the issue, the more grace we must show to one another when we disagree.

Even on less central issues, those who are going against a wide-spread consensus are the one who bear the burden of proof in establishing what the Bible says. Consider a matter that has been much discussed in Christian circles in recent years: the role of women in the church. This is not a creedal matter, but when we look at Christian practice throughout history and around the world we see a dominant (though not unanimous)

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<sup>1</sup> They would have considered the Old Testament scripture as authoritative, but of course did not yet have what we know as the New Testament. The letter that Paul wrote to them to talk about this problem is now recognized as part of the New Testament, but, although they doubtless received that letter as a wise, Spirit-inspired communication, they could not have known that someday it would be understood to have the same authority as the Hebrew scriptures.

conviction that women should not be leaders in the church. Therefore, those who advocate allowing women into leadership need to make a Biblical case for that position. The burden or responsibility of offering evidence rests on them.

Meeting that responsibility will require doing much more than saying, "In today's culture, the way things have been done in the past no longer makes sense." All societies, all eras, and all cultures have blind spots when it comes to Biblical teaching, things that the Bible requires that seem self-evidently wrong, irrelevant, and irrational from that culture's perspective. This is why throughout history Christians have always found themselves advocating ideas that are strongly counter-cultural. The call to Christian faith and life that we find in the Bible requires transformation not only of individuals but of societies as well.

Naturally our context presents us with questions that may be different from the pressing questions of other times and places. The sorts of questions raised by ancient science aren't the same as the sorts of questions raised by contemporary science. Because the Bible is a supernatural book with a divine source, we confess that it is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), and so can respond even to questions that were not known when it was written. It is like a seed sown into the life of the Church as well as into your individual life; when it is sown into good soil, soil that is nourished and well-tended, it will always be bearing fruit. But that does not mean that the answer we find in the text will be pleasing to our contemporaries.

To continue with the example of women in leadership, simply saying that our culture thinks differently about women than did the culture of first-century Jerusalem is not a sufficient response to centuries of Christian practice. If that practice ought to change, then we must make a case from the text itself. This will involve looking at all the passages in Scripture that talk about relationships between men and women, meaning that there is no shortage of data. We will have to ask many careful questions. My approach is to let those questions be shaped by the history of redemption that unfolds in the Bible.

- We start with God's creational design. When we read the accounts of the creation of men and women in Genesis, what do we think was God's original plan for their relationship with each other? Much of the Church's historic practice has been founded on a conviction that male authority is built into the creation order. Was that a cultural blind spot that led to misreading the texts in Genesis, or is such a design really there? Are there other texts in other parts of the Bible that speak about the creational plan for men and women?
- Then we consider the fall into sin. What parts of the interaction between men and women are the result of sin? Not everything that is presented in the Bible is meant to be normative. For instance, there is a great deal of violence against women through the

Old Testament, yet few if any Christians would argue that God approves of such violence. What aspects of the relationship between men and women fit this category, and what aspects do not? With most questions that we bring to the Bible, it is challenging to tease apart the differences between the way things are in a sinful world and the way things God intends them to be. What guidance does the Bible offer us for making that distinction in this case?

- We think about God's response to sin in the giving of the Law. How is God's will as expressed in the Law serving as a crutch to deal with the injury of sin and how is it expressing an ideal that persists in a sinless world? How is the Law like or unlike the laws of surrounding nations? How does the way the Bible presents the role of women contrast with the way surrounding ancient cultures understood the role of women? Does the Bible pull against surrounding cultures at all, and if so in what direction?
- Then we look at the coming of redemption. Does the coming of Jesus change the way men and women are supposed to relate? Does Jesus explicitly affirm, reject, or transform any Old Testament practice? Are there further changes in the wake of the resurrection and ascension? Are any of the effects of sin now set aside or healed through His work, or will such healing not happen until the next life?
- The history of redemption ends with the consummation of all things that will happen in the new heaven and the new earth. What do we know about God's final intention for the relationship between men and women in the life to come? Is that a goal that should already be influencing our lives now, or is it a goal that is unattainable now?
- Finally, we consider the great sweep of the Biblical narrative as a whole. Is there any movement over the course of the whole of the Bible in terms of how the relationships of men and women are envisioned? There are some things that are unchanging over the whole course of the Bible, but others (such as slavery, for instance) that change and develop. Which category does this question belong to?

This sort of careful, systematic exploration of the whole of the Bible can be applied to many different pressing questions. It can give you a sense of the grand plan that God has for His creation. The medieval theologian Bonaventure says that after sin made it difficult for us to read the book of Nature, "it was necessary that there be another book through which this one [the natural world] would be lighted up, so that it could receive the symbols of things. ... Scripture has the power to restore the whole world toward the knowledge, praise, and love of God."<sup>2</sup> The Bible makes sense of life by showing us how everything fits into the big picture of God's plan. So Bonaventure is right in saying that Scripture lights up the meaning of the world around us.

Christians believe that the best interpreter of the Bible is the Bible itself, and so when we are trying to understand something difficult in Scripture, we should not look for isolated texts but rather try to glimpse the full teaching of the Bible in its full context,

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<sup>2</sup> *Collations on the Six Days*, XIII.12

allowing different parts of the story to interact with each other. We should assume that the Bible speaks with one, coherent voice. The results of such an exploration may not be definitive and will probably not end debate, but neither will they be random. There is a big difference between submitting to Scripture by careful study and simply saying “We need to be relevant,” or “We’ve never done it that way.”<sup>3</sup>

The hard questions are fewer than those that are clear. Often what we claim is a lack of clarity is really our unwillingness to hear what is being said. In contemporary North American culture, we are often blinded by our consumerism and our individualism. Reading the Bible should make us uncomfortable with how much stuff we have, how poorly we control our appetites, how we spend our money, and how rarely we consider the claims of our community on our personal decisions. At other times and in other places, Christians have had different blind-spots when it comes to reading the Bible. This is why it is important for us to read it together with Christians who represent the whole Church, from different time periods and from different places.

Over and over, the Bible shatters our safe, domesticated understandings of God. No matter who you are or where you live, the Bible will upend your life if you take it seriously. It is a book of great comfort, but it is not comfortable. And if our theology is really rooted in this text, then sometimes it will also be alarming, and wild, and shattering.

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<sup>3</sup> Full disclosure: I believe that there’s not only a case to be made for women in church leadership, but I believe it’s a very strong case. I’m a pastor, and I wouldn’t have pursued that calling if I weren’t convinced the Bible not only allows but encourages women in such a role.

Try going through the questions thinking of some other difficult issues. I think you’ll find that the results don’t always follow the same pattern.

# Gender and Sex in Creation, Rebellion, and the Kingdom

Rev. Dr. G.P. Wagenfuhr

This chapter describes:

- Difference between gender and sex: some current ideas
- How gender and sex relate to the story of God's people in the Bible
- That God established biological sexual dimorphism in creation, but did not establish eternal gender roles or identities
- How sin establishes gender roles and identities
- That both gender and sex are redefined in the kingdom of God and the resurrection
- That the church has work to do in studying God's word to understand what gender in Christ means

We cannot talk about how God created humans as male and female without encountering very current issues of gender dysphoria, gender fluidity, the differences between sex and gender, and more. This rapidly changing social and political climate offers an opportunity to re-examine the basic concepts of gender and sex and how they have changed over time. Christians who commit to the authority of God's Word can be confident of its truth without fear of modern questions. It does not aid our witness, nor our love of God to choose to not encounter hard questions. Rather, this chapter shows that the modern discussion of sexuality and gender identity helps us understand the Bible and Paul's teaching about what it means to be in Christ.

## Gender vs. Sex

One of the more basic findings of the study of sociology is that human societies are not the same in all times and all places. However, biology tells us that humans have quite a lot of physiological similarities over time. How do the differences of human context and human biology relate and interplay? Is the argument always simply nature vs. nurture? The answer has to be that both are vitally important. There are no humans that we know of who lived without social pressure to conform. There is no basic "state of nature." At the same time, it would be foolish to say that human biological development plays no role whatever in who we are. Nature and nurture work together to create determinants in our lives. These are things we are thrown into long before we are capable of making choices. But that does not mean we are predestined by these determinants to a fatalistic course of action. When it comes to gender and sex, it is vital to keep biology and society equally in mind, as these are the grounds of major contemporary battles.

Within the field of social sciences, *gender* has come to refer to a *social construct*. That is, gender is not speaking about biology, but about ideas, identities, and roles that biology has played in different cultures. It is only in very recent history that people have begun to think of gender as able to be entirely separated from biological determinations of sex. This is part of a process aided by technology called *excarnation*, in which people begin to separate their self-identity from their physical bodies in a longer vision leading toward *transhumanism*, which is the belief that human biology can and should be surpassed by uploading human consciousness to computers.

The word sex has come to refer to a biological fact, *gender* has come to mean a *belief about the meaning* of that fact. Gender and sex were synonymous in the English language for over 500 years, but their meanings began to change in the twentieth century. This shift in the twentieth century is not simply an act of politics, but a recognition of new features of that and this century: gender role revolutions. With the radical and rapid changes of industrialization, humans began to view other categories as more primary in self-understanding than gender or sex. We can see in images like Rosie the Riveter (propaganda poster figure encouraging women to hard industrial labor during WWII) gender roles and identities being rapidly transformed by the state and its need of industrial output. The situation was highly similar in the Soviet Union, which was often at the forefront of the granting of equal opportunities for women. To put it bluntly, the twentieth century produced technologies that made gender identity submit to the state and to productivity. "I can do anything you can do" became a feminist statement of equality that is rooted entirely in economic productive capacity. The world changed, and so too did the humans who inhabited it, along with their beliefs about themselves. People became "human resources" in the machine of raising the gross domestic product (GDP), and that has transformed the way we think about our physical bodies. With the advent of modern surgery, the cultural avoidance of death, the desire to use ready-made products to construct ourselves, gender and sex have come to be seen as things we can and should modify.

So, let's go back to the Bible and review what it has to say about gender and sex.

## Creation

Genesis clearly states that God created humans as male and female, and that they are to be for one another in a certain complementary fashion. It is not good that the man be alone. With these statements we most obviously see that God created humans as *sexually dimorphous*. This is a biological term used to describe species in which its males and females bear marked physical differentiation. Some animals have very little differentiation between male and female except for reproductive organs. Sexually dimorphous animals have distinct differences in physiology based on their sex. This can

involve size, shape, coloration, horns or antlers, longevity, and more. In humans this difference is acknowledged in Scripture as it pertains to physical strength (1 Peter 3:7) and beauty or “glory” (1 Cor 11:15).

These differences are rooted in biological facts. Bone structure fits biological purpose in male and female, which contributes to strengths and weaknesses. But these biological facts do not contain within them any meaning or value. The meaning or value of these biological differences is given by gender ideas, and the world’s gender ideas are rooted in alienation from God and his creation. *Scripture does not comment on any possible difference of intellectual capability or leadership capability in male and female.* The Bible has almost nothing to say about the nature of being female. It is remarkably free from most stereotypes of the ancient world, and includes many texts that challenge ancient stereotypes.

## Rebellion

Genesis 1–2 serve as an introduction to the introduction to the story of the people of God. Genesis 1–11 is a prehistory to the people of God that begins with the call of Abram in Genesis 12. Abram/Abraham is the patriarch of the people of God, and this people is what nearly every following page of the Bible is about. We must remember that the Bible offers very little quantity of information about creation itself, because it is not a book about creation, but about God’s rescue of a people and of his creation from the reign of sin. The information the Bible does give about creation is very high in theological quality, but very limited in its scope. Genesis does not seem too interested in describing what it means to be male or female beyond the physical labor they must each endure in Genesis 3.

Genesis 3 is the rebellion of God’s people. We do not have space to go into many details about the nature of sin here. But one major point to note is that this rebellion is understood as Adam and Eve deciding for themselves what is good and desirable independently from God. This, I call “*judgmental deification*” which means becoming like God through the act of judgment. God creates through judgment,<sup>4</sup> and every act of judgment brings new creation. This is why Jesus did not come to judge the world in his first coming (Jn. 12:47), but will in his second (Acts 17:31), which will be new creation. This is why, when God chooses a person and judges them to be righteous in Christ, he or she becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:16–17). God is the judge and only God has the right to discern this from that, good from evil.

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<sup>4</sup> Judgment does not refer to an evaluation of good vs. evil, but to an act of discernment or to a pronouncement of discernment. Good vs. evil is a type of moral discernment, but not the only one. So, when God separated the land from the waters, he put his discernment or judgment into words that the creation itself obeyed.



But humans like to play God, and the chief way we do this is by acts of judgment in which we determine what is good and what is evil. We too create a new reality, though a false one, when we engage in judgment. This plays out immediately in Genesis 3:16 in the creation of gender roles and hierarchy. There is no indication in Genesis 1–2 that Adam and Eve have established or fixed roles and identities. Eve is not even named “mother of all life” until after their sin (3:20). While God created them as complementary by their sexual dimorphism, it is not until their rebellion that this becomes fixed in social hierarchies, roles, and definitions. Sexual difference in humans is a good creation of God. Gender is a sinful creation of human imagination in rebellion against God’s rule.

We see this by the fact that gender is always and everywhere integrated into environmental and social conditions. For ancient peoples, the strength of a man, especially a hero like Achilles, Heracles, or even Samson, showed that they were more “godlike.” Achilles, the hero of Homer’s *Illiad*, is said to be godlike in his rage. His overwhelming testosterone levels led him to be an excellent warrior in one-on-one combat. But he was not good at politics, and often did not display wisdom. A modern godlike man may be more akin to an Elon Musk or Steve Jobs. These are people who can become great successes by a dogged focus, a relentless creativity, a foresight into the technological possibilities, and significant wealth that they gained by their own genius. Their sexual behavior is often largely irrelevant to their masculinity, unlike Heracles and Samson who are both defeated and shamed by women. The difference in values and visions of godlike masculinity are significant. They are shown in the way people dress, in what people see as “attractive,” in what a man “ought” to do.

The same goes for women as well. An ancient aristocratic Greek woman would be a powerful woman who could manage a household. This did not mean cooking and cleaning up after the three kids. It meant that she would manage numerous slaves in various fields. She would be able to host guests and provide for them, thus playing the role of a caterer and kitchen manager. But she would be expected to stay in the household most of the time and be veiled anytime she went out of the house. In the *Illiad* we see the wife of Hector (the hero of Troy who loses to Achilles in solo combat) in a tender scene with her husband and their child. Her name, Andromache (battles with men) is highly suggestive. She is no push-over. She’s a model wife of a warrior.

Consider Yael (Jael) from the Bible, who uses her cunning to gruesomely kill the enemy general Sisera who was fleeing (Judges 4). Or think about Judith from the book of Judith in the Apocrypha. Her name simply means “Jewish woman,” and she used her cunning to kill an enemy general, Holofernes. Judith gruesomely cuts off his head. Both of these women accomplished alone what an army could not do. These pictures of ancient femininity are not what we often think of as “traditional.”

If we move to a Victorian middle-class female stereotype, we have a purposefully helpless woman who is constantly journaling about her feelings, scheming about her best

prospects in marriage, fainting at nearly every emotional distress. She's wearing layers upon layers of clothing, including a tight corset (that may be a major contributing factor to the fashion of fainting). For her, life is about courtship. The hardest physical thing she might do is ride a horse. She certainly wouldn't be expected to work. But she must excel in virtue. We think, naturally enough, of Jane Austen novels.

These ancient and modern examples show how facts are interpreted in different ways. Andromache was not going to war. She would have no hope for survival against Achilles. But she was not weak. She would not be a character in *Pride and Prejudice*. Likewise, what was model manliness in Achilles or Samson would now be considered "toxic."

## Human Societies and their Environments

Hunter-gatherer societies, which represent over ninety-five percent of the history of *homo sapiens*, were "relatively egalitarian."<sup>5</sup> We have more recent evidence of this in many North American native tribal cultures. Tribes like those who were part of the Iroquois Alliance practiced a cooperative form of gender roles. The female elders governed life in the camp or town. They managed the collective resources of the tribe. The men had to ask the women for permission to have something. In a sense, they were household managers, though their household included the whole village. The men had their own hierarchies outside of the camp where they spent much of their time hunting and gathering food. As with many pre-farming cultures, they were matrilineal (traced descent through their mothers).

The farming revolution is now understood by sociologists and anthropologists to have been disastrous in a great number of ways. It led to a radical hierarchization of all society. Now whole classes were invented, and men dominated women. As people moved to living in settled places, ownership of land and of people became the primary means and benefit of power. Most of male humanity became the property of others in slavery. Women almost universally became property. Both were subjected to harsher labor and higher specialization of labor. Bone records show evidence of this quite dramatically. Archaeology is also able to show that these farming communities that birthed civilization had dramatically reduced life expectancy rates than their "barbaric" contemporaries. In the Bible we see a memory of lifespan decrease in Genesis 5. We see the worsening labor and slavery conditions both in Egypt and even more during the reigns of king Solomon and Rehoboam. Solomon extracted heavy taxation and work requirements on his people. There is a direct connection between his hundreds of wives and concubines and his exploitation of his people for public works. This is normal imperial behavior, as outlined in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 and 1 Samuel 8:10–18.

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<sup>5</sup> James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. Yale University Press, 2018, page 6.

The point of all this is that gender roles are not created by God, nor entirely determined by biological sex. *Gender is related to sex, but is not the same thing.* We also see that the Bible records snapshots of different understandings of gender roles in different times. It made sense for Abraham the patriarch (who grew up in a major urban center) to use his slave-woman (Hagar) for producing legitimate offspring when his wife (Sarai/Sarah) proved barren. This is a practice that continued among nobility. Some of the prominent Reformers (Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, Martin Luther) even secretly produced biblical justifications for polygamy in relation to King Henry VIII of England and Philip I, Landgrave of Hesse, both of whom were bigamous rulers.

Sexual difference was created by God, but gender roles were not. Gender roles are (in part) social adaptations to particular environments, and they cannot be extracted from them. Whether it is the communal children, the highly complex extended tribal family systems, or rules about acceptable marriage relations (number and consanguinity), anthropology has revealed an amazing diversity among human societies. Within each of these many diverse groups there are gender role similarities and differences.

*So, we should not be surprised to find that gender roles in the Bible fit the people of their time and environment.* King David did what other aristocratic people did in his time. Lydia, the seller of purple goods with whom Paul ministered also did womanly things in her day. Joseph would have been expected to divorce the virgin Mary, as he contemplated doing when he found out she was pregnant not by him. Paul speaks about hair and head coverings as related to men and women. We wouldn't expect Mary to gruesomely kill Herod, nor would any in her time. Mary lived in a very different time and environment to Yael! It would be a mistake to categorize all premodern peoples as "traditional" in regard to their gender roles. There are no such things as universally held traditional gender roles!

By this, I think it is reasonable to conclude that *God did not establish gender roles for humans even though he made us sexually dimorphous.* We may also conclude that *there is no God-given natural law for gender roles.* This is not to say that God has not given specific commands about human marriage. But as we will see, even that most basic of human social relationships is subjected to radical revision in the kingdom of God.

## Separating Gender from Sex?

In recent decades there has been a semi-conscious move to entirely divorce gender identity from biological sex. This has led to notions of gender dysphoria in which people have a deep feeling that their gender identity does not conform to their biological sex. Before we dismiss this offhand, it is important to ask the question, Why do people believe what they believe? Or maybe the better questions are, How does

behavior reveal belief? How does belief describe an environment? What make a belief *plausible*?<sup>6</sup>

The notion that gender is a construct has led some to conclude that they can determine it for themselves. Thus there is a belief in transgenderism, that one's identity can move between different gender identities. There is also a move away from binary gender identities of male and female. Why do people believe this, and how is it plausible? Such beliefs only make sense when the determinations of biology are reduced to a minimum and even purposefully quashed. With the invention of effective birth control, the range of meaning of woman changed. With effective machines that do all heavy labor, physical strength is no longer a primary category of gender definition that would lead to gender role specialization. In factories, women have often been more highly valued than men, and hence more exploited. In moving off of farms and into cities, children have transformed from assets to liabilities. Instead of providing help on the farm, children now involve significant cost and investment, with little return. Rather than living in extended families in which the elderly are cared for, in cities the elderly are put into relatively anonymous care facilities. This further transforms the meaning of family and children, making them less of an investment. Some economists describe children as "durable consumables" akin to appliances. They do not mean this as a way to demean children, but as a description of the factual way they are treated in the larger economy. Under this definition, people *choose* to have children (i.e. assumption of birth control/family planning) because of the benefits they will get from having the child (mainly emotional). But this investment will only last for about 18–25 years.

Thus, ideas about gender have changed with industry, birth control, and urbanization. To be a woman does not have any *necessary* connection with motherhood now. Likewise fatherhood has become optional and subject to a cost-benefit analysis. *The more removed from God's creation we are, the less our biological sexuality plays into our gender definitions.* In a completely artificial reality, e.g. online on computers, the self is entirely constructed, and so gender has almost any meaning one wants to give to it. In cases like these, gender will disappear as a meaningful categorical distinction. Those who claim that gender is fluid and not binary are already in the process of making the concept meaningless. We shouldn't mistake this as a loss of God-given gender roles and identities, however. Ancient societies were brutal in their own ways. Our brutality is more refined, individualized, and made into a consumer product. We have no evidence of a long-term golden age when supposedly God-ordained gender roles led to social harmony.

All this is a description of merely one aspect of human sin. In sin, we suppress knowledge of God's creation by the construction of human environments with human

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<sup>6</sup> Plausibility means something is possible or likely, but not necessary. Something that is plausible makes sense.

truths and human meaning. We worship the things around us rather than God. The very reason sexual deviancy exists, according to Paul, is that people do not act as God created them, but as they imitate the world around them (see Rom. 1:18–32).

## Gender, Sex, and the Kingdom of God

God created biological sex. God has not created the numerous gender roles and identities throughout human history. We cannot simply appeal to creation in the Bible to establish gender identity or roles, because we do not live in God's creation. We all live in humanly constructed worlds that are described by Paul as "this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). God's creation is effaced by the human creations that constantly surround us. What we need is to be rescued from this present evil age, so that we can be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2). Only in this way can we re-imagine what gender and sex mean according to a different environment: the kingdom of God.

This means the kingdom of God must be understood as a real environment in which we can live, and move, and have our being. If the kingdom is only a dream, only an idea, only a moralistic vision given in sermons, it will have little practical impact on how people understand gender and sex.

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God has come to rescue the world from its evil and from the humanly constructed false worlds with false beliefs that seem to form a reality more real than God's creation. In the waters of baptism, Christ washes away socially constructed identities of race, gender, and socioeconomic class (Gal. 3:27–28). In Christ God does not affirm us as we believe ourselves to be, but gives us the alien righteousness and identity that belongs to adopted children and co-heirs with Christ of God's kingdom. There is neither male nor female in Christ. The old is passing away and a new identity has come that has no room for gender division.

Jesus explains that there is no marriage in the resurrection (Matt. 22:30, Mk. 12:25, Lk. 20:35–36). In these passages, Jesus denies that a woman belongs to a man, as well as denying that our sexual dimorphism exists for the sake of mammalian reproduction. Just as there is no marriage in the resurrection, so too there are no families. We are not to call any man "father" because we have only one Father who is in heaven (Matt. 23:9). Jesus' family are not those who are of similar blood, but those who are of equal allegiance and obedience to God (Matt. 12:48–50, Mk. 3:33–35, Lk. 8:21). Even marriage itself is redefined in Christ. Christian marriages are only a shadow of the coming reality of the union of Christ and his people. They are supposed to model the relationship of Christ and the church. It is a symbolic reality (see Gal. 5). Like all shadows, these marriages will pass away when the full reality comes. Christian marriages are still bound to the biological realities of human sexuality. But Christian marriage is intended to lead us from our biological reality, with its temptations, to the fully incarnate spiritual reality of the kingdom of God in which sexuality is sublimated to the kingdom life. Marriage is

a school of discipleship leading man and wife into a future of self-control. Hence, for Paul, celibate singleness is preferable. This singleness is a step closer to the reality of gender in Christ, provided it performs its proper function of concentrating its free time on pursuit of the kingdom and not selfish gain (see 1 Cor 7).

Paul understands that joining the body of Christ is a marriage. We are united in the flesh to Christ as a people. It is the final consummation of this marriage to which we look forward in the resurrection. Put another way, we are all part of the female body that is united to Christ in the “consummation” of the kingdom. Jesus himself uses this imagery in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25).

Gender as a human social construct is eliminated by the judgment of God and his new creation. There is no longer male nor female in the kingdom of God. This does not mean we become androgynous beings. Biological sex is not eliminated, but it is refashioned and repurposed in the resurrection toward God’s new-creation intention. The call of the gospel has never been to a certain type of humanly constructed gender or family model. These fit their places and times and do not make sense outside of them. The reign of sin is felt in all of them. Ancient patriarchy, modern egalitarianism, and postmodern transgenderism are equally eliminated in the waters of baptism. There may be things God has for men and women in the resurrection that we cannot yet imagine! *But, there is no godly gender role apart from union with Christ.*

## Gender in Christ

Being in Christ is a new gender identity that belongs to the kingdom now and not yet. While we cannot attain the fullness of the resurrection, it is our duty to reveal this kingdom reality to the world. There is no room in the New Testament to justify going back to the way the world works. If we are able to freely exercise the life of the kingdom now without damaging the church, we must. But we are not always able to do this. This is, of course, why Paul does not call for the liberation of all slaves, even though he commands that Philemon treat Onesimus as a brother, which not only implies his liberation, but also a radical elevation to *mutual submission*.

In times past it has not been feasible for Christians to speak strongly about the future reality of the kingdom and what gender in Christ could mean. “In past generations he allowed all the peoples to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16). Now, however, we live in a time when gender and sexuality are facing an unprecedented definitional breakdown. In this time of radical confusion we are now able and encouraged to re-think what gender in Christ means by returning to the Bible and the radical teachings of Jesus and Paul.

## Part II: Biblical Texts

## Genesis 1 and 2 Overview

Rev. Dr. Laura A. Smit

The creation of human beings is plural. Male and female are in His image – both in the sense that men and women are equally made to reflect God, and in the sense that they do this work of reflecting God partly through their relationship with one another. In the contemporary church, there are often disagreements between people who call themselves “complementarians” regarding how men and women should interact and people who call themselves “egalitarians” regarding how men and women should interact. But the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 make clear both that men and women are equal (equally human, equally in God’s image, and equally commissioned as His stewards and representatives) and also that they complement each other, that is, that they are not identical or inter-changeable but are different in ways that strengthen and help one another. Humanity is not complete without both male and female, and this distinction between male and female is essential to God’s design for human beings.

By the time God creates human beings, He has already made all the birds, the fish, and the animals that live on the land, yet in none of those acts of creation does the text specify that He creates them male and female. This tells us that the difference between men and women in humanity is something more than the sexual difference between animals. As with animals, this difference makes procreation possible, and that is certainly an important part of the creation of human beings, as is seen in that God’s first word to His new creatures is that they should “be fruitful and multiply.” Such fecundity is one way in which human beings reflect God, since He is the source of all fruitfulness and generativity.

But the difference between male and female in human beings also communicates something more. In the New Testament we learn that in a mysterious way the loving union of a man and a woman in marriage can reflect something of our union with Christ. In both instances, the union is between two who are simultaneously the same and different, who are made to fit each other. This is reinforced in the second creation account, where the man and the woman are made separately and their relationship to each other is considered from a different vantage point.

In that account, God says that the woman is made to be the man’s helper (Genesis 2:18). This has often been heard to mean that she is to be his subordinate, but in fact the word “helper” is most typically used in the Bible to refer to God Himself, who is our help. The creation of the woman is a way of addressing the deep loneliness of the man, a loneliness that is the first “not good” thing in the new creation. It is a puzzling



loneliness, since at this point in the story the man has perfect, sinless communion with God. Why should he be lonely? The fact that the woman is created to fulfill a helping role that is properly God's suggests that she is to function as a connector between the man and God, helping the man to experience the helping presence of God by being "bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh." In other words, the creation of the woman prefigures our need for God in human form, for the incarnation of God in Christ.

In this second account, the woman is described as one who corresponds to the man, or stands facing the man. Older English translations of this word say that she is "meet" for him, one who encounters him the way one puzzle piece fits into another. This is where the old English word "helpmeet" comes from: the woman bears God's helping presence to the man in a way that meets him. The Genesis story does not talk about the man being God's helping presence to the woman, but other Biblical teaching about marriage allow us to expect that this reflection of God to one another should be mutual, particularly after the redemptive work of Jesus.

## Judges: Understanding God's Vision for Reversing the Fall

Rev. Dr. Laura Smit

Judges recounts a failed venture. Behind the failure to inhabit the land of Canaan as a holy land lies the ongoing reality of the Fall. The book of Judges shows the people of Israel attempting to undo the double effects of sin articulated by God in the double judgment pronounced on Adam and Eve. Adam's sin damaged his relationship to the land, and in the book of Judges we see the people of Israel beginning but ultimately failing to restore an appropriate dominion over the land. Eve's sin damaged her relationship to Adam, and in the book of Judges we see the people of Israel beginning but ultimately failing to restore a life-giving relationship between women and men. These two themes – the broken relationship of Israel to the land and the broken relationship of women to men – each wind through the entire book from beginning to end. They are related to the two great sins of Israel in the book of Judges: idolatry and intermarriage with the Canaanites.

In the beginning, Adam was made to be a priest to the creation. Eve was made to be a priest to Adam. In the second creation account, Adam is made before Eve, and his state of aloneness is the first thing in this sinless creation that God identifies as "not good" (Genesis 2:18). Our familiarity with the story may make it difficult to see how odd this is. Adam is in a state of sinless communion with God Himself. Shouldn't a relationship with God be enough for us? How is it that Adam is described as alone in a not-good way? Furthermore, God is our Help, the original Help from whom all other help derives. This is a common theme throughout the Bible.<sup>7</sup> How is it that Adam needs another helper? Eve's creation suggests that our need to encounter God's presence in human form, that is, our need for the incarnation, is not simply a response to sin. Even apart from sin, Adam needs to encounter God in one who is "bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh" (Genesis 2:23).<sup>8</sup>

In the first creation account, Eve shares Adam's commission to be God's image in the world He has made. In the second creation account, the particular way in which Eve is to do this is made explicit, even as the particular way that Adam is to do this is made explicit. Adam is made from the earth; Eve is made from Adam. Adam is the mediator to the land from which he is made; Eve is the mediator to Adam from whom she is made. Adam is priest for the creation; Eve is priest for Adam. She is the one who is named the *ezer* or helper, a word used over and over in the Old Testament to describe God. She is

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<sup>7</sup> See, for a start, Psalm 54:4; Psalm 121:2; and Hebrews 13:6.

<sup>8</sup> I take it that this is evidence in favor of the idea that the incarnation would have been fitting anyway, even if there had been no sin, though of course that is not the same as saying that it would have been *necessary*.

created as a type of Christ, a forerunner of the incarnation. Her calling is to embody God's Word to Adam.<sup>9</sup>

The fall into sin is initiated because Eve fails in this calling and fails spectacularly. Instead of bringing God's Word to Adam, she brings the word of the serpent. Because she is his bone and flesh, Adam receives that lie in the place of God's truth and acts on it. The curse on Eve is twofold, changing her relationship with her children and with her husband. God tells her, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16). Up until this point in the story, if there is a hierarchy between Adam and Eve, Eve is at the top of that hierarchy. It may be that other passages of Scripture, such as Galatians 3:28, give us reason to assume that there was no hierarchy in the sinless creation and that Adam was meant to be a priestly helpmeet back to Eve in a mutual showing forth of God's presence, but Genesis 2 alone makes no such suggestion. After the Fall, however, there is definitely a hierarchy established by the new experience of sin. From now on, husbands will rule over their wives, and women's needy desires will make them complicit in their own subordination. And from now on through the whole of the Old Testament, though women may occasionally function as prophets and as rulers, no women will serve as priests in Israel's worship.

But again, Genesis 3:15 promises that the disordered state of alienation reflected in the curse on Eve will not endure forever, any more than the alienation from the land reflected in the curse on Adam will. Could it be that the new life in Canaan will be a life in which this curse is rolled back?

Again, things begin positively. At the very beginning of the book, we have the figure of Achsah, who fulfills the role with her husband Othniel that Eve failed to fill with Adam. Othniel is the faithful victorious one (Revelation 2:26-29), to whom Caleb, the father, gives his child as a spouse. Achsah then intercedes with her father on behalf of the man she has married, so that Caleb gives Othniel good land with springs of water on it. Here we have a woman fulfilling the role of the priestly helpmeet, serving as a type of the High Priest who is also Bridegroom, who intercedes with His Father for His Bride, and who comes to the marriage with the gift of living water. We also see Othniel fulfilling the role toward Achsah that Adam failed to fill with Eve. Othniel uses his power to dominate the powers of evil rather than living into the post-fall paradigm of dominating his wife.

There are many women in the book of Judges, and Achsah is the benchmark against whom they are to be measured. Deborah and Jael seem to come close. At the beginning of Deborah's story, she is recognized as a prophet and a judge. Barak, the

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<sup>9</sup> Also see Laura Smit, *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), chapter 2.

Levite, is reluctant to perform his priestly duty of leading the army into battle unless Deborah joins him in this role as well, and so she does. The battle is waged against Sisera, who can be understood as an embodiment of the curse on Eve. His own mother testifies (with approval) to his use of rape as a routine weapon in war. He is oblivious to the very existence of Deborah and to the threat of Jael. Dominating and ruling over women is central to how he is portrayed in the story. Ultimately, Jael, the seed of the woman, crushes his head with a tent peg (5:26-27). Barak and Deborah join together to sing a song of triumph summing up this victory, in which Deborah is described as “a mother in Israel” who has cared for the people of Israel so that they have enough to eat (5:7). There is much here that appears to be an undoing of the curse on Eve, and yet it is all done in an atmosphere of threatening violence that is far removed from the Edenic ideal. Although Deborah and Jael measure up to the benchmark of Achsah, their circumstances do not. This is also true of the next story featuring a woman: the false king Abimelech is killed by a woman dropping a millstone on him, crushing his skull (9:52-54), again an echo of the promise in Genesis that the serpent’s head will be crushed.

Beginning with chapter 11, however, women pre-figure Christ not by being priestly helpmeets but by being sacrifices. Jephthah’s daughter is sacrificed by her father, in sharp contrast to the loving treatment that Achsah receives from her father Caleb. Samson’s wife is burned to death by the Philistines, and her father is burned with her (15:6). The Levite sacrifices his concubine to protect himself (19:25), and after she has been raped to death he cuts her body into pieces and distributes them to all the tribes of Israel (19:29).

The final story in Judges shows two groups of young women taken by force to be the wives of the Benjaminites, with whom the army of Israel has been at war. First, 400 young virgins from Jabesh-gilead were taken, after the inhabitants of the city were slaughtered by the men of Israel (21:8-14). Then 200 of the daughters of Shiloh were abducted by the remnant of the tribe of Benjamin with the collusion of the other tribes (21:15-23). The pairing of violence and marriage takes place on a grand scale. It is clear that the curse on Eve has not been undone any more than has the curse on Adam. These stories of horror in the last part of the book demonstrate the ongoing reality of men dominating women in ways that lead to death. Most of the women in the last part of the book are unnamed and do not speak, clearly not fulfilling the role of priestly helpmeets.

But the male priests also fail to fulfill this helpmeet role. Barak is a timid Levite who needs to be cajoled into doing his job. The Levite who serves as Micah’s priest in chapters 17 and 18 is leading worship to an idol, and the Levite who sacrifices and then cuts up his concubine in chapter 19 leads the tribes of Israel into war while denying his own cowardice. In the last half of the book, there is no faithful priestly presence in Israel, no one – male or female – who speaks the Word of God and embodies His helping

presence, other than an indirect reference to Phinneas, grandson of Aaron, who is still serving before the ark at Bethel.

The coming of Jesus addresses both the curse on Adam and the curse on Eve. Jesus is the second Adam who leads us into rest (Hebrews 4). In the new heaven and the new earth, our right relationship with the creation will be restored, and already now the power of Christ allows us to anticipate that restoration. Jesus is also the second Eve, our great High Priest who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. The reconfiguring of marriage in the New Testament as a relationship of mutual submission is a step toward the rolling back of the curse, as is the new creation promise that in Christ there is neither male nor female for all Christians are united into one body, a promise that begins to work itself out in the new creation reality of the Church, where men and women work together as brothers and sisters, as equals. While a direct reflection of the curse on Eve is seen in that there are no women priests in the Old Testament, in the New Testament our only priest is Christ, but men and women alike receive His Spirit, are transformed into His likeness, and share in His offices. Jesus also transforms the role of the sacrifice into a role of power, for in His person He combines the role of the priest with the role of the one who is offered up.

## Deborah and the Role of Women

Rev. Dr. Laura Smit

Theodoret of Cyrus, who wrote an early commentary on the book of Judges, asks the question, “Why did a woman prophesy?” His answer is surprising for his era, or at least surprising to us, given our prejudices about his era:

Because men and women have the same nature. As you know, the woman was formed from Adam and, like him, possessed the faculty of reason. Hence, the apostle says, “In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.” Thus, Moses was called a “prophet,” and Miriam a “prophetess.”<sup>10</sup>

The existence of a woman who speaks with the authority of a prophet and acts with the authority of a judge has troubled many readers who assume that women should not hold either role, but the text is completely calm about Deborah’s function. The story of Deborah has often featured in debates about the role of women in the contemporary church. Should women be teachers? pastors? priests? These are vexing questions for many Christian denominations today, and Deborah is invoked by people on all sides of these issues to support their position. The primary questions are first, whether the story of Deborah is relevant to this contemporary debate; second, whether Deborah’s roles as military commander, judge, and prophet are normative for women throughout time or an exceptional accommodation to a particular situation; and third, whether those roles do or do not correspond to the roles of pastor and/or priest in the contemporary Christian Church.

The story of Deborah is indeed relevant to this debate. The question of God’s design for women within the covenant community requires looking at the full sweep of Scripture, and the story of Deborah fits within the trajectory of the overall story. In the Introduction, we have already considered Eve’s creation as a priest to Adam, the “help (ezer) fit for” Adam because she was bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh. Within the original creation, it is specifically the role of the woman to foreshadow the incarnation of God in Christ, acting as the embodied mediator or representative of YHWH to Adam. My argument in that earlier section was that the creation design for woman is to serve as a mediator between YHWH and Adam, just as the creational design for man is to serve as a mediator between YHWH and the natural world. In other words, it is the woman, Eve, whose created nature is obviously priestly.

The curse that followed the fall into sin was also discussed in the Introduction as an important background to the book of Judges as a whole. Eve’s ability to be a priestly

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<sup>10</sup>Theodoret of Cyrus, *Questions on the Octateuch*, vol. 2, *On Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, ed. John F. Petruccione, trans. Robert C. Hill (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), p. 329.

mediator is derailed by her sinful desire for subservience, and the absence of any women priests in the Old Testament is a result of the curse on Eve. For this reason, although Deborah fills the roles of prophet and judge, being authorized both to speak the word of YHWH and to exercise administrative authority, she requires the presence of Barak the Levite to fulfill the priestly role. His reluctance to fill that role means that she steps into it beside him, joining him in leading a holy army into holy war, but the text makes clear that going into war is not supposed to be her job.

Even before the coming of Christ, YHWH works to undo the effects of sin and restore the good creation. The giving of the law includes stipulations protecting women from falling into a state of radical subservience, requiring women to be protected and treated with dignity. The people of Israel are commanded to take the land back from the powers of the serpent and reassert YHWH's rule over it, to function as genuine mediators between YHWH's grace and the land itself, until a state of shalom or creational well-being should be established. But the curse of Eve is also addressed. This new land of Canaan is to be a place where women are named, where women speak, and where women serve as mediators. Deborah does all these things. But just as the occupation of the land fails because of human sin, so too the restoration of women fails because of human sin. Ultimately, it requires the recapitulating work of Jesus to undo the effects of sin and make us – both male and female – into new creations. This is seen in that the role of women expands throughout the trajectory of Scripture, with women in the New Testament being enlisted as witnesses to the resurrection, leaders of house churches, teachers and evangelists. Even the famous pastoral prohibition - that women may not teach but must learn in all submission (1 Timothy 2:11) – fits within this trajectory, since the “submission” that women are to demonstrate when learning is the submission of a student of the Torah before the teacher. In other words, Timothy is told that women are now to be allowed to learn the Scriptures, the necessary prerequisite for becoming true teachers. The rabbis taught, “Better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman.” For women, the door to learning opens in the New Testament. In place of the disordered and needy subservience to a husband, women are to learn the rightly order subservient to God Himself.

Some commentators suggest that Deborah only fills the roles of judge and prophet because the men in Israel are not “stepping up” to do their duty, so the presence of a female leader is a disordered situation that should serve as a judgment on male abdication of leadership. One such scholar is Michael J. Smith who asserts:

The first three judge stories, Othniel (3:7-11), Ehud (3:12-30), and Shamgar (3:31) set the stage for coming stories by providing normative male roles and leadership, with only the beginnings of signs of decline. The story of Deborah, Barak, and Jael (chaps. 4-5) introduces a reversal of roles as Barak failed to step up to the challenge of leadership as the designated judge and thus lost the honor of killing the enemy commander. In his place, God used Deborah, a “mother in Israel,” and

Jael, a non-Israelite wife, to play key roles in delivering Israel. Judges 5 is unique in that the narrator inserted a psalm of Deborah, in which she taught Israel about the Lord and His victory – something the men should have done.<sup>11</sup>

However, the text does not support this view. Othniel is the paradigmatic judge, and each of the three judges immediately following Othniel instantiates that paradigm in a particular way, in each case including some quality that readers may find unexpected or at least distinctive. So Ehud is left-handed, and the minor judge Shamgar is not an Israelite, and Deborah is a woman. Ehud's story does not support an assertion that left-handed people are only allowed to be leaders if all the right-handed people abdicate their responsibility and refuse to take leadership positions. Shamgar's non-Israelite status does not support an assertion that God only welcomes non-Israelites into leadership within the covenant community when all the children of Abraham refuse to do their duty. And Deborah's story does not support an assertion that female leadership is a disordered concession to male irresponsibility.

Before Barak is ever on the scene, before he has had any opportunity to accept or reject a position of leadership, Deborah is introduced as a prophet (*na`biy'ah*) who is judging (*shaphat*) Israel. Neither role is presented as at all problematic. There is no suggestion that any men have refused to serve in these roles, nor was either role ever offered to Barak for him to decline it. The stories both before and after show that there were indeed men being called into this office, so Deborah is not serving as a judge as some sort of judgment on men. Neither is her role of prophet presented as a judgment on men. It is only her role as a military commander that is presented as problematic in this way. She goes into battle as a direct result of Barak's cowardice, as an accommodation to his failure. But the other two roles are simply seen as normal. So, harking back to our original three questions, the role of military commander is presented as an exceptional adaptation to an unusual circumstance, but the roles of judge and prophet are presented as normal and acceptable roles for a woman to fill.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael J. Smith, "The Failure of the Family in Judges: Part 1, Jephthah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (July-September 2005), pp. 281-282. Other scholars don't even bother to make this argument; they simply identify Barak as the judge in the story, rather than Deborah. See, for example, Williams, who in a list of judges with their tribal affiliations says simply "Barak from Naphtali" with no mention of Deborah whatsoever (p. 80). This despite the fact that Deborah is identified as "judging" Israel, whereas Barak is never so identified.



# 1 Timothy 2:11–15

Dr. Amy J. Erickson

1 Timothy 2:11-15 is prevalently misread to sanction blanket dismissal of female teachers and preachers in the church. This article reconsiders these verses in light of Paul's expressed aims in writing to suggest a reading which takes its Ephesian address fully into account. In so doing, it offers the most theologically responsible interpretation of v. 15, one of the most troubling and perplexing verses in the biblical canon.

The situation is dire. False teachings have infiltrated the church and are polluting the gospel, promoting speculative and controversial talk rather than works of love (1 Tim 1:3-7). Paul (or the Pauline author) is likely unsurprised. Timothy is in Ephesus, a city that has caused him plenty of trouble before (Acts 19:23-41; 1 Cor 15:32). And out of the starting gate, Paul is clear about his main aim for writing: he is going to direct Timothy to tell "certain people" to stop teaching false doctrines in order to arrest the spreading poison (1 Tim 1:3). Thus, Paul is not setting out to tell Timothy who does not get to teach orthodoxy, but who he wants to stop teaching heterodoxy. What follows is less a prescriptive blueprint for normative church life than emergency orders issued in a time of crisis. In this article, I will demonstrate why a dominant understanding of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, which I will refer to throughout as "male-exclusive" readings, are mistaken to read this text as universally barring female teachers in the church.

When we arrive to Paul's instructions regarding women in the second chapter, the context has already been set as one of pastoral intervention targeted to forestall false doctrine. The first verse is a positive command: "Let a woman learn in calm and in all obedience."<sup>12</sup> The word I have translated "calm" (*hēsychia*) is sometimes translated "silence," but this is different from the silence which Paul demands in 1 Corinthians 14:28, 30, 34 during the worship service to prevent people from talking over each other. It denotes stillness rather than speechlessness; the contemplative hesychastic prayer tradition derives its name from it. Paul also tells women to study in obedience, and I find no textual reason to suspect that they are to be obedient to anyone other than to their Subject of study (cf. 2 Cor 9:13).

"I won't allow a woman to teach and bully [*authentēin*] a man, but to be calm" (1 Tim 2:12). Here we again encounter the word *hēsychia*, which sandwiches these two verses and is consistent with Paul's main aim in this passage to promote peacability (1 Tim 2:2, 8). The verb "to teach" is combined with the verb *authentēin*. Both the verb "I permit" (*epitrepō*) and *authentēin* are governed by the joint negative construction

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<sup>12</sup> Translations are my own unless indicated otherwise.

*ouk...oude* ("neither...nor"). We also find this construction in Matt 6:26, in which there is a sense that the second negated item *is already implied* by what preceded. Thus, the birds of the air "neither sow, nor reap" because if they do not sow, they *de facto* cannot reap.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, *authentein* is implicated in the kind of teaching which Paul here refuses to tolerate. That is, *authentein* is part and parcel of the teaching which Paul is forbidding. It is often translated "authority" but this is misleading, as this is not the standard word for authority which we find elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. 1 Cor 11:10). In fact, this word is a *hapax legomenon*, a word which appears nowhere else in scripture. As such, its meaning is not clear, but other uses of it in the ancient world denote bearing arms. Its etymology suggests one who has dangerously appointed themselves as an autocrat.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the situation Paul seems to address here is one in which women were weaponizing false doctrines in a misandrous manner—a situation which makes much sense given its Ephesian setting.

In what follows Paul makes what male-exclusive readings regard as a theological appeal to a created order, which explains why women are not permitted to teach full stop. However, as we consider these three verses in more detail it will become evident why I am using the word "unsustainable" to describe my concerns with male-exclusive exegesis of this passage. This type of reading simply cannot sustain the material which the text presents.

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman—after being deceived—came into transgression. But she will be saved through child-bearing,<sup>15</sup> if they continue in faith and love and holiness with soundness of mind." (1 Tim 2:13-15)

Many male-exclusive readings overlook or dismiss the final and troublesome "child-bearing" sentence.<sup>16</sup> But these verses operate as a literary unit: the final sentence is constitutive of the allusions Paul stitches together here to extend his preceding admonition. If we are going to responsibly derive a principle of male-only teaching from this portion of scripture, it must account for how this unit functions within the wider passage. What often happens instead is that these first two verses are cherry-picked in order to prop up a pre-determined reading of the creation account, which itself has already been interpreted through a pre-determined reading of *this* passage as its primary lens.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. also Matt 27:14; Luke 18:13; Acts 7:5.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, Thayer's Greek Lexicon informs that an early usage meant "one who with his own hand kills either others or himself". "831. Authenteo" (Biblehub.com), <https://biblehub.com/greek/831.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> This word is the second *hapax legomenon* in this passage.

<sup>16</sup> For example, the chapter in Piper and Grudem's text on this passage in 1 Timothy makes this equivocating comment on v. 15: "While we do not think that the interpretation of this verse is decisive for the meaning of the verses that precede it, the verse does conclude the paragraph and may shed some light on the whole." Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, 186.

What this hermeneutical loop neglects is that the Greek particle *de* (“on the other hand”, “but”) indicates, if anything, that the final closing sentence *overturns* what has just been stated regarding creation-order and the fall.<sup>17</sup> If an appeal to created order is going to be sustained from this passage that blanketly forbids women from positions of teaching in the church, an exegetically responsible reading must either account for Paul’s reference to child-bearing or suspect that his point is not being adequately apprehended here.<sup>18</sup> This is not in the least because at face value, Paul’s reference to child-bearing is deeply disturbing: to suggest that women are saved by having children flies in the face of all that we know to be true of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me offer a reading which takes the historical context into account, and which illuminates the perplexing facets of this passage. What this reading suggests is that in verses 11-12 Paul confronts the insidious *form* of the false teaching which he has been bent to weed out from the beginning (1 Tim 1:3), and that in verses 12-15 he confronts this false teaching’s *content*. These verses thus emerge not as an appeal to a theological principle to establish a universal precept, but rather as a remedy for heresy.

Ephesus boasted the Temple of Artemis, home to the Greek cult of the goddess of hunting, wild animals, and childbirth.<sup>19</sup> The Temple of Artemis is ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world, so we can only begin to imagine the compelling presence with which it overshadowed Ephesus and the fledgling disciples of that city. And indeed, we have already seen the two coming to a head when idol-makers who provisioned Artemis’ shrines resented the threat which Christians posed to their trade and instigated a violent riot (Acts 19:23-41). Considering that Artemis is the goddess of hunting and wild animals, we can deduce that the cult taught women to behave more combatively than contemplatively, modeling a manner that was more Amazonian than Christ-like. We can also suspect that the pull of syncretism would have been strong. In light of the significant role that women held in the Artemis cult combined with the deficiency in theological education of women due to Jewish custom (which Paul’s injunction in 1 Tim 2:11 decisively combats),<sup>20</sup> female disciples would have been especially prone to spreading heretical rumors funded by the pagan religion, which taught that the female Artemis originated first (cf. Acts 19:35) and was responsible to aid women in childbirth.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Paul makes a similar movement in 1 Cor 11:3, 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 2 Peter 3:16.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Jordan, *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 92.

<sup>20</sup> Consider these words by the first century Rabbi Eliezer, which puts the gospel’s revolutionary perspective on the theological education of women in stark relief: “Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity.” Leonard J Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 154.

<sup>21</sup> Stephanie Budin, *Artemis* (Routledge, 2018), “Introducing Artemis.”

Thus, it makes the most sense of the text and its context to read Paul as correcting the behavior and misunderstandings of women who had adopted aspects of the Artemis cult, not as outlining male prerogative to lead. With this understanding in place, we can appreciate Paul's artful wordplay in 1 Timothy 2:15. After knocking down several false teachings in a row, Paul makes a surprising turn to affirm one of these heresies, only to put it in service of the gospel: women are saved through child-bearing, yes, but only because a woman (Mary) has delivered a child—the savior Jesus Christ. This reading accounts for an otherwise inexplicable shift in subject from singular ('a woman') to plural ('they'). Having admonished them to crack open their theology books to cure these false doctrines, Paul then encourages these women to express their salvation in a befitting way. It is from here—with this encouragement that women display a character-filled response to salvation—that Paul launches into a list of the character traits of church leaders. Without any qualification, Paul claims that *anyone* desires a "good work" if they aspire to be an "overseer" of the people of God (1 Tim 3:1).

## Text Overview

Rev. Dr. G.P. Wagenfuhr

This chapter looks at specific texts that have been used in discussions around gender roles, briefly outlining how they may be interpreted.

### Genesis 1:27—The Image of God

Among biblical ideas, the image of God or *imago Dei*, is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied concepts available. Part of the problem is that few take the time to study its historical context and thus grasp what this concept could have and could not have meant to its original author and audience. Likewise, few compare this concept Paul's understanding of it in the New Testament.

The image of God cannot be about *human nature*. The evidence is incontestable that this type of thinking, called *ontology*, did not exist for centuries until after Genesis was written. The question, "What does it mean to be human" is, from the Bible's perspective, a very modern question! It came about among Greek philosophers in the 600's BC, and does not seem to penetrate to common people until after the Renaissance in Europe. Theologians trained in Greek philosophy ran with this concept early on, however, and so it has a long-standing misuse in the church's history.

The image of God is about *humans representing God's presence through his dominion*. The immediate context of Genesis 1 shows us that the image is about dominion. Now, dominion does not mean domination. That comes after Adam and Eve's rebellion in Genesis 3 when they corrupt the image of God. God's dominion must be his according to his character. Adam and Eve were together supposed to *represent God's character*, which is, of course, love.<sup>22</sup>

What is important to understand, however, is that Genesis is very clear that Adam is not the image of God without Eve. This is a concept the New Testament will pick up on as it reinterprets gender in Christ through the church. Male and female together are the image of God.

When Paul picks up on the language of the image of God, he understands it, not as something we have inherent in us, but as something we have to *attain*. For Paul, Christ is the true image of God, his true representation (Col. 1:15). The goal of the Christian is thus to become the image of God by becoming like Christ together as a church (Eph. 4:9–16). Where Genesis has the image of God as united in male and female, Paul has it completed as the body of Christ in the church as it properly works. Thus, Paul begins to

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<sup>22</sup> I write about the image of God in more depth and how it fits into the whole biblical story in *Unfortunate Words of the Bible*.

see a people-in-Christ as the image of God itself. The counterpart of this, of course, is that the image of God is not found outside of the people of God. Humanity in and of itself is not a representation of God, but its opposite. All peoples must die to themselves to join the image of God in Christ. The church's job, of course, is representing God, his kingdom, and his call to reconciliation, which is the form that loving dominion takes after rebellion.

Thus, there is no sense in which the image of God could ever bring hierarchy among God's people. The image of God is fully revealed in the mind of Christ as Paul says in Phil. 2. If we want to be the image of God in Christ, we must consider others more significant than ourselves. This also means that the "flesh" or our natural way of doing things apart from Christ, will only lead us astray. Any kind of natural gender roles, then, tell us nothing about what being in Christ is about.

## Genesis 2

### Helper

Eve is said to be Adam's "helper," which is often taken as a mark of subordination. A helper helps a superior. The problem, as has often been pointed out, is that God is often called by this word throughout the Old Testament. The helper who is right for Adam is the one who will complete his purpose and ability to exercise the dominion God has created him for as his image. The complementarity here gives no evidence of authority or hierarchy.

### Order of Creation

Some argue that the order of creation reveals the primacy of the man. Others argue that the woman being created last of all creatures is the pinnacle of creation. Richard Bauckham rightly argues that humanity is not the apex of the creation account, the Sabbath is.<sup>23</sup> The whole of creation unified under the restful reign of God is the culmination of the creation story. Creation does not exist for humanity, humanity exists as part of the creation for God to express his rule of love. Any deviation from this, i.e. wrongful hierarchies however they are justified, violate the Shalom-rule of God.

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<sup>23</sup> Bauckham, Richard. *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*. London: Dartman, Longman, & Todd, 2010, 17.

## Genesis 3:16b

This verse is translated in different and conflicting ways depending on a translation committee's theological choices. Thus, this passage usually reinforces a preconceived perspective. For example:

ESV: "Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."

NASB, NIV, NKJV, : "Yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

Hebrew:  $\text{לְאִשְׁרָתָא לְעִנְיָנָא וְלְרִיבָא וְלְשִׂנְאֵתָא וְלְעִנְיָנָא וְלְרִיבָא וְלְשִׂנְאֵתָא וְלְעִנְיָנָא וְלְרִיבָא וְלְשִׂנְאֵתָא}$

LXX:  $\text{καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα σου ἢ ἀποστροφή σου, καὶ αὐτός σου κυριεύσει.}$

Note that there is a question as to whether the woman desires her husband, or desires against him. Is there some kind of rightful harmony of female submission here? Or is it that she will desire things against him, yet he will nevertheless rule over/overpower her? The important Hebrew word here is simply the preposition "el" which often does mean "for" or "towards." This is how the LXX, NASB, NIV, and NKJV have taken it. However, as BDB (standard Hebrew dictionary) notes in definition 4, "Where the motion or direction implied appears from the context to be of a hostile character,  $\text{לְ}$  = *against*."

This means in order to properly translate this passage we have to look at the context. Are Adam and Eve now hostile toward one another? Yes. These curses in Gen. 3 show how the Shalom-peace of the seventh day is broken. The serpent is now most cursed of the beasts (3:14). The woman is now against the serpent, and her offspring will fight against him, each harming the other (3:15). The woman will not now be able to be fruitful and multiply without much suffering. The man and her are now at odds (3:16). The man is now at odds with the land, he will not be able to have dominion over it without a fight. Eventually the land will reclaim the man, thus ultimately winning the war. The man does not have dominion in the end, the land will dominate the man by consuming him (3:17–19). In this context there is an uninterrupted flow of curses, war, and battle. To say that 3:16 contains some kind of ideal relationship between male and female would be to dramatically interrupt the flow of the narrative. The Hebrew "el" should therefore read as "against" just as the ESV has it. The woman will desire things against the man, but in violence, men will dominate women. Domestic violence in the dominion of man over woman is the fruit of sin, not the order of creation. This fits quite well with Paul's statement in Galatians 3:28, and his understanding of Christ "killing the hostility" between Jew and Gentile in Eph. 2. By connecting these lines of thinking, Christ kills the hostility as well between male and female.

Genesis 3:17—"Because you have listened to voice of your wife and eaten

of the tree”

Some have pointed to this verse to argue that Adam sinned in the act of listening to/obeying Eve, that a man should not obey a woman, just as the woman should not have obeyed the serpent. This argument goes that men are created to be in authority over women, and so this is an inversion of the creation order for Adam to obey his wife. The problem with this is clear: neither the serpent nor Eve issued commands. The problem isn't that Adam *obeyed* Eve, but that he was tempted by her words. The problem wasn't listening to the woman, the problem was listening to the content of her temptation. Adam succumbed to temptation, not to woman in general. These two clauses “Because... and...” belong together and do not represent two distinct problems.

### Genesis 3:20

“And the man called the name of his woman Havah (Eve), because she would be the mother of all living”

This verse has brought controversy because Adam named Eve, which is said to demonstrate his authority over her. This point is hardly worth considering, as:

1. If it is a symbol of authority it is merely a fulfillment of his wrongful domination of her from Gen. 3:16.
2. No matter what it symbolizes in terms of authority, it does not purport to establish eternal gender roles between male and female.
3. It misunderstands the point of naming in Genesis 2–3. Adam's naming of the creatures is not a demonstration of his rule over them, but a demonstration of building a personal and loving relationship with them, in the same manner God has.

When we read that God calls us by name, we do not see this as notion of God dominating us, but as God caring for us. We have no evidence that Adam named the animals according to their kind—giraffe, lion, bear, spider. Given what we know about the culture of the author of Genesis, it is far more likely that Adam was giving the creatures *in the garden of Eden* personal names.<sup>24</sup> That Adam called his wife “Eve” thus reveals that he had a personal relationship with her in spite of their division, just as God would offer them grace in clothing them with proper clothes rather than fig leaves.

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<sup>24</sup> For more on this see Wagenfuhr, G.P. *Plundering Eden: A Subversive Theology of Creation and Ecology*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020.



## Male-exclusive Priesthood in the OT

Often it is argued that women should not be ordained because the Torah allows only for the *sons* of Aaron, and Levi to be priests. While it is true that the Old Testament does not have female priests, this reveals nothing about how the church ought to operate. The Old Testament restricts the priesthood to a specific blood-lineage. However, the church has routinely condemned the practice of *nepotism*, or the granting of ecclesiastical posts to family members. Furthermore, one tribe of Israel was established as the one from which the priesthood would come, the Levites. They were not allowed any land when the Promised Land was distributed. They were thus not allowed to farm. As a tribe they would all receive the benefits of the tithes, whether they were priests or not. By extension, ordained pastors should take a vow of poverty. Thus, if we are looking at Old Testament priesthood for information about how we should do ordination in the church, we run into many problems.

Furthermore, the modern office of pastor has almost nothing to do with the Old Testament office of priest. Jesus Christ is the final priest of the Bible. He is the priest who ends the priesthood forever. The book of Hebrews is the only book to make the argument that Jesus is a priest, and to do so it has to address the major problem: he's not a Levite. Jesus is of the tribe of Judah, not Levi, so he's not qualified to be a priest. Thus, Hebrews argues that Jesus is a priest according to the line of Melchizedek, who was a priest to Abraham before Israel and Yahweh had a priesthood at all. Hebrews says Jesus is a superior priest to Aaron, because he was before Aaron (see Heb. 7).

Because there is no sacrifice remaining for any sin, there is no need for any priest. Jesus is the last priest, and with him the office of priesthood has entirely disappeared. The people of God are now a "kingdom of priests." That is to say, none of us are specially priests, but we are all separated from our common lives for the representing of God to the world.

There is no link in the Bible between an office of pastor/shepherd and the priesthood. Likewise, *there is no official office of pastor/shepherd in the New Testament*. Modern church offices have little formal connection to the New Testament and its practices and owe most of their existence to historical church development.

## 1 Corinthians 11:3–16

### Head: Authority or Source?

One of the most contentious passages in the debate about gender roles is 1 Cor. 11:3 and the notion of "head." The problem comes from the fact that in English the "head" so obviously means the leader or authority. This is metaphorical, of course. A

head literally means the topmost part of an animal's body. In Greek κεφαλή (*kephale*) has a different *semantic domain*. That is, the range of meanings it has does not precisely line up with the range of meanings "head" does in English. It can mean "authority" and sometimes does. It often means this in Old Testament Hebrew ראש (*rosh*). As Cynthia Long Westfall notes, however, in 171 instances in which *rosh* means "authority" the Greek translators (LXX) only used *kephale* six times, and none of these passages are referenced by 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7.<sup>25</sup> This is some evidence toward suggesting that Greek does not primarily use *kephale* to refer to authority.

The word here probably means "source." For English speakers this sounds a bit preposterous. It seems obvious that Paul is talking about authority and hierarchy in this passage. Although we can talk about the "head" of a river meaning its source, that meaning is rare and does not seem to fit this passage. But in much Greek usage, the head is understood as the source of life. If you cut off the head of a beast, it dies. In military examples *kephale* can refer to a leader, but it does so in an organic way rather than a hierarchical way. The army's life rests in the life of the head. Thus, the source of the existence of an army is the general, the head. If the general fails, is weak, or is killed, then an army will splinter. A king is the "head" of a people. He holds them together and gives them identity and definition.

Playing into this understanding of head-source is the teaching of both Pythagoras and Aristotle who taught that the head was the source of male semen, which moved down the spinal cord and to the genitalia. Thus, the head was seen as the literal source of descendants. The myth of how Athena was born is similar, she is said to have sprung from the forehead of Zeus. In this way an ancestor is the "head" and the descendent is the "seed."

In Paul's theology, there are two possible "heads" of humanity: Adam or Jesus. We are all "images" of the man of dust. We bear the character and resemblance of Adam. As his descendants we inherit his debt and guilt. But Jesus is the "man of heaven" and we are able to be in his image, and thus inherit his forgiveness and inheritance while bearing his likeness (See 1 Cor. 15:42–49).

What Paul seems to mean in 1 Cor. 11:3 is that Christ is the source of all life as the creator. Man is the source of life for woman, since Eve was created out of Adam. Thus, a husband is the source of life (identity) for his wife. God is the source of life of Christ. This also makes sense of what otherwise would prove at odds with Pauline theology elsewhere. Westfall puts it this way,

The three pairs are clearly meant to be parallel, but they are not parallel in terms of authority relationships:

- Every man is not functionally subordinate to Christ in the present age.

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<sup>25</sup> Westfall, Cynthia Long. *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016, 81.

- There is no distinctive sense in which Christ would be the authority over a man but not over a woman.
- No man experiences the degree or type of subordination to Christ that women experience to men.
- The Father and the Son are ontologically equal, men and women are ontologically equal, but men are not ontologically equal to Jesus Christ.
- No man experiences the degree or type of subordination that Jesus would experience if he were indeed eternally subordinate to the Father.
- The pairs do not account for authority relationships between men.

The fact is that masters are not described by Paul as the heads of their slaves in the household codes, because in the Pauline corpus, "head" is not synonymous with "master" or "authority."<sup>26</sup>

### Hair, Veils, Head-Covering

Put another way, headship is about image-bearing through familial resemblance. Thus, when Paul continues his argument, strangely to us, by talking about covering the heads of women but not men, it begins to make more sense.

Married women in Paul's day wore veils outside of the home. Unmarried women or underclass women (slaves, freedwomen) were legally prevented from wearing veils. A veil was not there to keep women modest in general, but to designate which women were sexually available. A veil acted something like a wedding ring. The reasoning behind this was that a woman's hair is her "glory." Her greatest point of sexual attraction was her hair. Paul teaches that *all* women should have their heads covered in church. The meaning of this was twofold. On the one hand it upgraded the status of underclass women who were not allowed to have veils. On the other hand, it sent the message that church was no place to be checking out who was available or not. For a woman to have her hair cut off is a symbol of shaming her in a culture that operated on honor and shame. If a wife was seen without a veil outside, it would be nearly the same as committing adultery, and would thus bring shame upon that woman and her household. The husband would have to bear that shame as well.

So, in 1 Cor. 11:5–15, Paul is discussing points that require cultural knowledge to understand. A woman with short hair is shameful because it symbolizes that someone has forced her to become ugly and undesirable. It has overtones of sexual violation. Paul is building on this cultural knowledge his hearers understood. If a woman prays with her head uncovered, it's as though she were shaved. She is throwing her "glory" and honor away. In v. 6 Paul is saying something like, "we all know that a woman would never shave

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<sup>26</sup> Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 87–88.

her head! Praying with her head uncovered in church is just as bad as shaving her own head. A woman who does try to use worship to attract men should have her head shaved." The idea is that she would be turning a house of prayer into a brothel by inviting men to look at her with sexual intent. A woman who prays with her head uncovered should have her head shaved to keep the worship properly oriented toward God, rather than toward the "glory" of a woman.

At the same time there existed a totally separate meaning to head covering. Roman priests would pray with their heads covered (*capite velato*). This wasn't a veil, but a bit of a toga that could be drawn over the top of the head, like a modern hoodie. Paul is saying that, if a man has his head covered, he is concealing the image of God, and thus practicing a form of idolatry. There is nothing in creation to which people should submit, instead, people should see Christ when they look at the church.

There is much more complexity and depth to this passage in 1 Corinthians 11 which we do not have space to cover here. What is important to understand is that Paul is working with meanings that are deeply relevant and readily understood in his culture that are much more obscure in our own. When properly understood in his cultural context, Paul is not saying that women should submit to men, but he is rather offering quite a progressive and liberative teaching here! Westfall concludes her investigation of veiling thus:

While [Middle Eastern culture] is the starting point of Paul's argument, and he appears to endorse the cultural ideas about the relationship of the woman to the paterfamilias, the development of his argument actually equalized the relationship between men and women, established their relative value, and brought out the reciprocity of their origin: although women came from man, man also came from woman. His focus and concern are not reinforcing or increasing the authority or control of husbands over their wives, but rather ensuring that God is glorified, that the women are not personally disgraced or shamed while they pray and prophesy, and that they not send out an inappropriate message through their dress by displaying their hair while they minister and worship.<sup>27</sup>

### **"Symbol of Authority" and Angels?**

To teach male authority from creation based in this passage, then, is to grossly misunderstand the whole of this passage. The issue of head covering is essential to the meaning of male "headship" for Paul. This is seen in 1 Cor. 11:10 where many English translations have "symbol of authority" for the word *ἐξουσίαν* (*exousia*). The "symbol" part here is added in by translators. A more literal reading would be, "because of this, a wife/woman ought to have authority over/upon her head because of the angels."

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<sup>27</sup> Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 42.

Again, the context of this passage is crucial. From study of other cultures that practice veiling, it is far less likely that the women were the ones who were causing trouble in Corinth and wanting to remove their veils. It is more likely that men were wanting women to unveil, and that this was putting them in an awkward position. If the women are not the problem, as is usually assumed, then the perceived meaning of Paul's argument is totally changed. If women were wanting to veil in church out of piety against a sexually liberal Corinthian culture, Paul is saying they have authority over their heads, and therefore can do as they please about veiling.

This also means that the otherwise strange "because of the angels" part makes sense. In 1 Cor. 6:2–3 Paul had recently said that the church will judge the angels in the context of telling the church to learn to judge matters for itself with maturity. So, Paul is saying that a woman ought to have the authority to choose for herself what she does with her own head, because she will one day participate in the judging of the angels.<sup>28</sup> Thus, to paraphrase, Paul is saying, "a woman has authority over her own head to do with as she likes because one day you will judge the angels."

### **Woman the Glory of Man (1 Cor 11:7)**

This "is actually a positive evaluation of women and indicates a high status, because she is both the image and glory of God, and she has such additional beauty that she is the glory of humanity."<sup>29</sup> Westfall explains this further by working with the notion of headship we explored above. Because Eve was created from Adam, he is her "head." That is, she bears his image. But Adam bears the image of God. Thus, Eve is both in the image of Adam and of God. Paul cannot mean that Eve is only part of the image of God because she was made from Adam. To say that directly contradicts the meaning of the image of God in Genesis 1:27. So, Eve has the double-image. Adam was created from the earth. Eve, on the other hand, was created out of Adam, and so is one step removed from the dirt-y origins of man.<sup>30</sup>

### **Woman Created for Man?**

1 Cor. 11:9 says that woman was created for man. Normally this is assumed that women were created to be subordinate helpers to men. Paul is probably simply referring back to the fact of Genesis 2. Adam was not good alone. Man needed woman, so woman was created for man. The woman was a helper to Adam, certainly. But a helper in Paul's day would often be a patron, a hierarchical superior to a "client." Roman society worked

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<sup>28</sup> See Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 34–43.

<sup>29</sup> Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 103

<sup>30</sup> Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 40–42, 72.

on this patron-client relationship in which a higher-up would help a lower person in exchange for honor. Paul is not saying that woman is superior to man here either. The point is, he's simply not making a statement of hierarchy at all. Woman was created to aid man who was no good without her, which is why she ought to have authority over her own head, and not be lorded over by men who tell her whether she has to unveil herself or not.

### **Mutuality**

Thus, Paul goes on in 1 Cor. 11:11–12 to reinforce that neither woman nor man can exist alone. Whereas sin brought division first of all between male and female, so now in Christ neither male nor female can stand alone. The image of God is incomplete without male and female, and so it is in Christ.

### **Long Haired Men are against Nature?**

Paul's reference to men with long hair here is not necessarily a statement about a factual situation in Corinth at the time, but to reinforce and sum up his teaching above. Women ought to have long hair, it is the glory of woman, who is the glory of man, who is the image of God. It's the best part. But for that very reason, it should be kept covered so that people are worshipping God, not female beauty. A man with long hair, then, would be unthinkable! Writing to Corinth, Paul was not speaking to what would then be called barbarians. Roman male custom was to have short hair and be clean shaven. Where Jewish men may, like Greeks, have had beards, they probably didn't have long hair *at this time*. Of course Paul knew about Samson and Nazarite vows. Paul himself kept some kind of vow that required a haircut (Acts 18:18), so perhaps he grew his long for a season as well. The point is, long hair in his culture was the surest symbol of feminine beauty. Men and women are complementary and should not be confused. Men should not flaunt the symbol of feminine beauty. In cultures without veils, where hair is not the "glory" of women, like in many of the European barbarian tribes of Paul's day, long hair among men was common without it being a symbol of effeminacy.

### **Cultural Relativity?**

This last point helps us understand the role of culture here. It's not because Paul is merely making cultural statements that we can write this passage off. Certainly cultures vary on their understanding of male and female beauty. Paul is working out the meaning of creation and gender here. God has created two sexes, male and female. They are not the same, they are for one another and cannot be the image of God without one another.

But they should not be confused. Nor should freedom in Christ be a license to sexual temptation getting in the way of worship. In Christ, we are free from our cultural norms, but we are not free to cause others to fall because of our freedom! *For Paul, complementarity ends hierarchy!*

## 1 Corinthians 14:33–35

Westfall summarizes these verses well in one sentence, “A command to submit does not constitute a reversed mandate for the other to subjugate.”<sup>31</sup> It is important to notice that Paul here does not place men over women in any way, nor imply that men are allowed to speak and women are not. He is not addressing men here at all.

We must also remember that the context of this passage is the letter that Paul is writing to the Corinthians, most likely earlier than Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Timothy. This means that those other passages with their *household* codes are not as contextually relevant as they might seem. This passage is continuing the discussion of the church in Corinth. So the problems of this church must be considered.

This was, like all of the earliest churches, a house church, not a large gathering. In our modern terms, it was more like a small-group meeting (up to fifteen people based on room sizes of the time). The house was the woman’s domain in Paul’s day. Women were household managers, and often had full authority in that domain over nearly all that happened. Likewise, in both Judaism and paganism of the time, women were the leaders of household worship. Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, had a shrine in nearly every pagan household which was attended to by the women. Jewish women would light candles and incense in the home, oversee purity regulations, and oversee worship-based food requirements.

So, it is in the context of a small-group assembly in a household in the name of Christ that Paul addresses women here. Keep in mind that *ekklesia* (church) does not mean “church” as we mean it today, but simply an assembly of Jesus-followers.

In 1 Corinthians, this passage falls in the midst of Paul talking about the exercise of spiritual gifts and the unity of the body (ch. 12), the greater importance of love (ch. 13), and that the gifts exist to build up the body (ch. 14) and be done orderly.

### Women Should Keep Silent in the Assembly

Paul is not here talking about when a woman prays or prophesies, because that would contradict what he had said in 1 Cor. 11 when he said they should do these things with their heads covered. Women are said to be prophets in the New Testament (in Acts

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<sup>31</sup> Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 76.

21:8–9), and so they possess the highest gift (1 Cor. 14:1–5). So, he is here explaining that women shouldn't be talking when others are. Why single out women? Many suggest a variety of answers to this. One reason is that the women would likely be hosting and looking after hospitality, and thus talking about the relevant things that need to be done, as can be seen in the story of Mary and Martha (Lk. 10:38–42), where Martha is busy fulfilling her cultural gender role, but Jesus acclaims Mary's neglect of her gender duty to attend to his teaching.

Another reason for singling out women could be that they had no education in how to participate in group-learning. Women were often not highly educated in that context, and were not included in the types of public life a man might enjoy that would train him in listening skills, of forming questions until after a lecture, etc. Learning in classroom settings, many modern people take these skills for granted. Even now, however, people in poverty cultures often do not have experience in this style of learning, and so frequently interrupt a speaker. Kenneth Bailey, having lived for forty years in the modern Middle East, explains similar female-specific issues in his experience, "Attention-span problems, limited knowledge of Greek, accent issues, language levels of Greek in use, lack of amplification for the speakers, along with chatting as a methodology for learning are all involved."<sup>32</sup>

Thus, Paul is not making a blanket statement that women should always and everywhere not have any place of speaking in public worship. There are many women who are commended for their public ministry in the New Testament, as in the Old. But as a generalization, women would have had less experience in such contexts than the men involved, and it should fall to their husbands to explain to them how a public meeting works. This is not Paul encouraging "mansplaining," or saying that men alone are capable of grasping theological truths. Better equipped husbands should equip their wives to be able to be full participants in a public assembly or lecture-style meeting. We know that Paul could lecture through the night! That kind of attention-span is out of reach of most modern people as it was for Eutychus (Acts 20:7–9).

## Ephesians 5:21–6:9—The Household Codes

Much about headship has already been said above. We only need to make a few points about this passage.

### Context

Paul's use of these household codes are *applications* of his theology. They are not usually the best places to go to understand his theological vision. For that, the early

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<sup>32</sup> Bailey, Kenneth. *Paul*, 416. See Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 228–242.



chapters of Ephesians set out just such a grand vision, and that is a vision of reconciliation. God has predestined his creation to be united in himself (1:10), and his people have a very special part to play in that as adopted inheritors with Christ in this new creation. This will come by the tearing down of the walls of hostility, primarily seen in Ephesians as between Jews and Gentiles (chapter 2). Chapters 1–2 explain his theology, chapter 3 sets out Paul’s qualification to write this letter. Chapter 4 transitions to address the particular needs of the letter: these Gentile converts need to walk worthy of this high calling Paul has just outlined! Chapters 5–6 continue with practical examples of how to walk worthy of their calling of reconciling all things to Christ.

### Submit to One Another

Paul opens his household code section with the command that all must submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). This command is not isolated, but is the guiding theme what he is teaching about wives-husbands, children-parents, and slaves-masters. In Paul’s time, of course, these relationships are understood in radically hierarchical ways. Each of these is a category of *property* in the Roman world, and Paul is addressing a Gentile audience.

More often than not, though not without exception, a wife was essentially bought by a man from a father. A woman was generally allowed to own property. A woman was never an independent person, instead, she was always under the authority of her father, her eldest brother, or her husband. In the case of divorce, a woman was sent back to her father or brother.

Likewise, children were not free, *even into adulthood*. Not only daughters until their marriage, but sons were always subject to their fathers, until the father’s death. A father, *paterfamilias*, was something like a king in that he reigned as long as he lived. While Paul is here addressing non-adult children, the point remains that children were bound to their parents in ways we often do not observe.

Most obviously, slaves were property of their masters. But less obvious to us is the sheer amount of slavery. Classical Athens was about two-thirds slave in population!<sup>33</sup> While Roman slaves could be released in a process called *manumission*, freedmen were still of the lowest rank in Roman society.

Asking for husbands, fathers and mothers, and slaveowners (male and female) to *submit to one another* was revolutionary. The idea that a slaveowner would *serve communion* to a slave was outrageous. To think that a man might even serve a woman in a house church was a complete violation of gender roles of the time.

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<sup>33</sup> Scott, James C. *Against the Grain*, 156.

## **Wives Submit to Husbands as to the Lord**

As with all of Paul's household codes in the Bible, he is tempering his radical teaching with a plea to not create problems. Wives, though they are free in Christ as people of equal status as their husbands, should submit to them for the sake of Christ. The same goes for slaves. Submitting to a husband "as to the Lord" does not mean that a husband is Christlike because of his being a husband! It means that the act of submission is done *in spite of* her particular husband. No man deserves her submission, but a wife is to treat her culturally necessary submission as part of her service to Christ.

## **Husband is Head of Wife as Christ is Head of the Church**

We have already covered headship above. While headship *can* mean authority, that use is by far less common and is not necessarily best here. Christ is the life and identity-giver of the church. If we disgrace Christ, we disgrace the whole body, and vice-versa. So also, a wife should not disgrace her husband by disobedience, and so bring shame on an entire household by her conduct. If a woman shames her husband (e.g. having her head unveiled), she shames herself and her whole family.<sup>34</sup> So, a wife should submit to her husband as is culturally appropriate. This is done, of course, out of love for Christ, not out of the *rights* of the husband!

## **Wives, Children, Slaves**

Paul has a gospel of radical freedom for all peoples in Ephesians. The plan of God is to tear down dividing walls, not to build them up. As we see in Philemon, Paul makes every attempt to subversively, cautiously, and lovingly tear down dividing walls of hostility based on culturally constructed definitions of people. Children are free in Christ to be in Christ alone, but they should still learn from their elders. But in the kingdom of God which is coming there will be none of these hierarchical relationships. We often miss this when debating about slaves and women, but the gospel is liberation for children as well, who should not be prevented from coming to Christ (Matt. 19:14, Mk. 10:14, Lk. 18:16), who are told to let their dead fathers bury themselves (Matt. 8:22, Lk. 9:60), who are told not to call any human "Father" (Matt. 23:9), who are going to be divided against their family authorities (Mt. 10:35–37, Lk 12:51–53), and who will receive far more in the kingdom than the loss of family (Mk. 10:28–30). Children will know wisdom directly from God (Is. 54:13). Paul's household codes are not in contradiction to Jesus's radical

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<sup>34</sup> See also Lee-Barnewell, Michelle. *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*, chapter 8.

teachings in the gospels. They are his pastoral and practical outworking of this now and not-yet coming of the kingdom.

### Colossians 3:18–4:1—Submission “in Christ”

Colossians here is similar to Ephesians. Wives, children, slaves should all submit to their masters because they are “in Christ,” not because that is just by nature or by creation. But, what Paul adds in Colossians is a clear statement that submission is “in Christ.” Note in 3:18 Paul says, “as fits in Christ.” This is a particular kind of submission that is fitting for those who belong to Christ. Masters should recognize that they are slaves themselves. No one is truly the master. Thus, those in authority must act according to the character of God in Christ, which Paul explains on a number of occasions, notably Philippians 2.

This submission has a purpose, and there will be a reckoning in due time. The way a master treats his slave, a husband his wife, a parent her child will be paid back.

To sum it up, “God shows no partiality.” That is, God does not acknowledge human structures of authority. He does not regard people differently according to human social constructs. Slaves are not slaves in God’s kingdom, neither are lords treated as lords. God’s justice does not discriminate between women and men. Since God’s justice is his creative power, for God to acknowledge human social distinction would be to establish it as valid. In other words, God cannot have a double standard between his created intention and his final kingdom goal. We cannot say that God created gender hierarchy only to deny that it will exist in the kingdom.

Submission to power in this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) is for the sake of honoring Christ as the true king, not those who pretend to be kings, lords, and masters. This is because the method of Christ’s kingdom coming is not with human weapons and overwhelming displays of power, but in meekness, humility, and loving reconciliation.

### Galatians 3:27–28—Baptism in Christ and Social Divisions

For Paul, following Jesus is not about aiding ourselves or our personal spiritual life journey. Being “in Christ” requires a total death of the self. For as many are in Christ have put on Christ. Christ is the clothing that we wear. In Paul’s time, clothing conveyed status. Everyone was always wearing some kind of uniform, not in an official sense, but in a way that showed everyone your social standing. Thus, to disrobe and put on Christ as in baptism requires that all social hierarchies be washed away in the waters of baptism.

Indeed, in the waters of baptism, human socially constructed identities are washed away. This is why Paul has a “neither, nor” construct here. Paul does not say that there are both male and female in Christ, but that neither exist. To be male is to not be

in Christ. To be female is to not be in Christ. To be in Christ is to be neither male nor female. This does not mean that we become sexless beings, but that any culturally created notion of male and female cannot exist with Christian identity, as is true also of slave-free, and racial/cultural identity. Whatever dividing wall of opposition between male and female identity must be reconciled in Christ.

## Joel 2:28–32 and Acts 2:16–21

The context of this passage in Joel, which Acts quotes, is the “Day of the Lord.” This is an idea in the prophetic books of the Old Testament that one day God would judge the world with righteousness, and that judgment would be terrible. It would be the time of the great reversal, when the rich would be cast down, and the poor empowered. The nations that had defeated Israel would be destroyed, and God’s people vindicated. After the Day of the Lord, God would pour out his Spirit on his people and men and women alike, young and old, will speak divine truths. Note that Joel envisions an overturning of division between male and female and social hierarchies. Young and old, male and female, and slaves will all be filled with the Spirit. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved from the judgments of the Day of the Lord.

Peter quotes this passage as he explains that those who were filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost were not drunk, but were filled with God’s Spirit. Peter sees that the Day of the Lord has come, in some way, in Jesus himself. Jesus is greater than even David by having been raised from the dead, and all who call on his name will be filled with the Holy Spirit as Joel prophesied. Along with his understanding that Jesus represents the Day of the Lord, with the speaking in tongues of Pentecost as proof must come the overturning of these hierarchies. This is seen at the end of Acts 2–4 where the church lives in community and the divisions of rich and poor are overturned. Later, in Peter’s rooftop vision and the conversion of Cornelius, we see a new overturning of Jew and Gentile in Acts 10. Throughout Acts we see women empowered with the Word of God and put into positions of leadership. Acts sees the work of God in the Holy Spirit as moving to eliminate the divisions that had been present.

## 1 Timothy 2:8–15

The final passage to consider is one of the most used passages by complementarians. Comments above about 1 Corinthians 11 apply equally here as well. Also see “For Shared Service” in this book.

The only point to make here that offers an alternative to Dr. Erickson’s is in relation to verse 15 and the cryptic notion of a woman being saved through childbearing. It is contextually plausible that Paul here is referring to the fear that women have in childbirth.

The high rate of both infant and maternal mortality in the ancient world were major contributing factors to ancient religion. Given that this letter was written to Timothy in Ephesus, which was a major center of the cult of Artemis, and which had already rioted against Paul (Acts 19:23–41), it is plausible that this verse has such a background.

“A woman will be saved through childbirth” has nothing to do with eternal salvation, then, but with being preserved through the life-threatening process of childbearing. This is similar to other promises in the Bible for health and preservation, like James 5:14–15 and many of the Psalms. These promises are not blanket guarantees, of course. 1 Tim. 2:15 is about how a woman who trusts in Jesus will be preserved.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, 129–141.

## Part III: Theology

# For Shared Service: Women, Paul, and the Body of Christ in Canonical Light

Dr. Amy J. Erickson

## Abstract

The canonical course of scripture attests to the full inclusion of women in every aspect of ecclesial life and service. Prevalent readings which hear Paul universally banning female teachers and preachers neglect this canonical shape. In so doing, this perspective commits to theological conclusions which threaten the church's corporate health and global witness.

## Introduction

When we read scripture—and when we read anything, for that matter—we choose to subordinate certain portions of that piece of writing to others in pursuit of a sound and holistic understanding of the author's message. This is done because texts are communicative acts which cannot be reduced to mere linear constructions, and as such must be negotiated with humility and patience.

Those who read scripture as barring women from ecclesial leadership tend to do so in deference to a specific set of Pauline texts, most often verses found in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2. Let me hasten to clarify that I retain a deep respect for those who elect to read scripture in this way.

In this article I intentionally avoid using the standard terms of classifying the two main perspectives on this topic. Namely, with "complementarian" designating the conservative position which attests that only men are to be charged with formal positions of ecclesial oversight and with "egalitarian" designating the liberal position which does not limit ecclesial roles on the basis of gender. I find fault with both of these terms, as I believe they carry unhelpful baggage that mis-frames this important discussion. First, for reasons that will shortly follow, I consider myself a complementarian, although I hold what many call an "egalitarian" viewpoint. This is because men and women, as Genesis attests, are created different. *How* they are different remains a mystery. Any one individual may easily resist the simplistic stereotypes that we may apply to their gender, no matter how much these stereotypes appear to bear truth from general experience. Of course, protests against the existence of any such difference stand contentiously at the forefront of contemporary discussions over gender and sexuality, however much such

protests also undermine the painful awareness of sexual difference which animates the #metoo movement and other feminist concerns.

The reason why I do not consider myself an “egalitarian,” despite harboring views that are commonly labeled as such, is that “egalitarian” imports neo-liberal values which are antithetical to the gospel. “Neo-liberal” names the philosophical climate of our contemporary, Western culture.<sup>36</sup> It animates our political and economic system, touting the principles of liberty and equality in support of an unbridled individualism. It imagines humans as vigorously autonomous entities who are licensed to pursue their self-oriented desires so long as they do not impinge upon the artificial buffer of another’s “rights”. By applying it to ecclesial conversation on gender and church roles, it suggests that men and women are “equal” and thus interchangeable. That is, it denies the very difference between men and women which Genesis bears witness to and which is constitutive of humanity’s capacity to image God. What is more, it unbiblically suggests that men and women are independent rather than interdependent. Thus, by revoking the term “egalitarian” I am by no means suggesting that men and women are of unequal value. Rather, men and women need each other to share the vocation of serving as God’s witnesses to and caretakers of his creation. The implied connotation of the term “egalitarian” in its current parlance suggests otherwise, and it does so to the church’s detriment.

## Women in Scripture’s Narrative of Redemption

What is presently labeled the “complementarian” viewpoint maintains that forging male-only domains of ecclesial life necessarily preserves what is understood as a divinely ordained male-headship-design, derived from a created-order-account. For this view, the stakes are high: allowing female leaders and preachers amounts to sheer disobedience which directly rebels against God’s intention. What I would like to draw attention to here is that—alongside its valid concerns—the application of this perspective operates at the steep risk of severely handicapping Christ’s body. That is, the stakes of reading Paul as universally disqualifying half of Christ’s body from certain ecclesial activity in a manner which threatens to choke the full out-flowing of the Spirit’s giftings upon the church are *also* high. It also threatens to cripple our witness in a society crying out for examples of men and women laboring together in unity out of the hard-won reconciliation forged by Christ. In what follows, I will attempt to illustrate that there is ample scriptural evidence that these costs are real, dangerous, and ultimately unnecessary.

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<sup>36</sup> For a concise definition, see Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies*, 3rd ed (Chichester, U.K. ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 337. And for an excellent critique of the project of liberalism more generally, see Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven London: Yale University Press, 2018).



As elaborated above, in Genesis, we are told that men and women *together* image God (Gen 1:27). Both are instructed to be fruitful and to rule over the earth (Gen 1:28). They receive no distinction in their tasks. Some insist that the fact that man was created first grants male prerogative, but the Genesis account does not indicate that chronology denotes authority. We might also recall that the pre-gender differentiated Adam functions for Paul as a representative of all humanity.<sup>37</sup> Some may also seek recourse to 1 Corinthians 11:3, but Paul's discussion of "headship" is in the end conditioned by his statement that men and women are *interdependent* (1 Cor 11:11-12).<sup>38</sup> This supports the chapter's portrayal of men and women leading worship together (1 Cor 11:3-4). It also aligns with what we see in Genesis, where woman is described as man's עֹזֵר (Gen 2:18). This term is often translated limply as "helper" but it means something more like "rescuer." Elsewhere in the canon it is a name of God (Ps 33:20). Woman rescues Adam from his loneliness and is gifted to humanity as reinforcements for the task of tending all of creation (1 Cor 11:9). At the fall, she is cursed with male rulership (Gen 3:16). Here the Bible suggests that male dominance is constitutive of the curse which is undone in Christ (Gen 3:15).

This undoing is evidenced in Jesus' ministry, in which women are not banned from directly receiving (Luke 10:39), following (Luke 8:1-2), financing (Luke 8:3), or sharing (John 4:39) the word of his gospel. I need not belabor here the revolutionary and culture-shattering nature of Jesus' engagement with women (John 4:1-27; Luke 6:36-50), and his interaction with Mary and Martha radically testifies that the theological realm is a woman's place before the domestic one (Luke 10:38-42). What is more, a woman quite literally bears the Word (Luke 1:35), and it is women who first bear witness to the resurrection (Matt 28:8; Luke 24:9-10). These two facts overcome suggestions that it is male prerogative to teach and lead because it was Adam's task to tell Eve about the command (Gen 2:16). If God's speech failed to come through a man at his creation, it has now resounded through women at his re-creation. In fact, we may read 1 Corinthians 14:36 as an admonition to early Christian women not to get too smug about their starring role in the drama of redemption. What is more, Jesus' resurrection garden scene decisively remakes the disastrous garden scene in Eden and whatever gendered hierarchy we may impose on it. The very first recorded word out of the resurrected Jesus' mouth is "woman".<sup>39</sup> There is a long-standing tradition in the church of giving this woman—Mary Magdalene—the title "apostle to the apostles" (*apostola apostolorum*).<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:22.

<sup>38</sup> Paul makes a similar move in 1 Timothy 2:15 when he qualifies the male-female creation order with the phenomenon of child-bearing.

<sup>39</sup> John 20:15. This was first brought to my attention by Beth Moore. "A Letter to My Brothers," (blog), May 3, 2018, <https://blog.lproof.org/2018/05/a-letter-to-my-brothers.html>.

<sup>40</sup> A swath of medieval theologians, including Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard, honor Mary with this title. Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New

The radical female engagement which characterizes Jesus' ministry is consummated by his death on the cross, the point at which the curtain of the inner sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two (Matt 27:5). The Jewish Temple complex was comprised of concentric areas which consecutively permitted Gentiles and women. These were known as the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women, the point beyond which these respective groups were forbidden.<sup>41</sup> Only Jewish men were permitted in the area immediately around the Holy of Holies, and only one Jewish male—the High Priest—was allowed inside, and this just once a year (Lev 16). Jesus' work on the cross decisively erupted the Holy of Holies and flooded God's presence onto all people, who now only require his mediation. As a consequence, there need no longer remain 'male-only' domains of the life of God's people any more than 'Jew-only' ones (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-18).

This outworking of Jesus' atonement by which men and women are reconciled is evidenced in the life of the early church. In 1 Corinthians 11, the puzzling head coverings passage, we receive advice regarding how women are to adorn themselves *when* they are prophesying and praying during the worship service alongside men (1 Cor 11:4-5).<sup>42</sup> The controversial 'women shall be silent' passage of 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 enjoins women to refrain from "chattering" (λαλεῖν) during the service. Instead of turning to ask about something they do not understand in worship—a probable scenario given Jewish tradition's resistance<sup>43</sup> to teaching women at that time—Paul encourages them to wait and discuss with their husbands at home (1 Cor 14:35). This accounts for what is otherwise a blatant self-contradiction by Paul regarding female involvement in the service. It also accords with this section's chief concern to promote orderly worship (1 Cor 14:40). Even those prophesying are told to "be silent" (σιγατω) if they lack an interpreter (1 Cor 14:28) or if someone else begins to speak (1 Cor 14:30). Likewise, I do

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York: Continuum, 2004), 88. I have also come across claims that both Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas make similar reference, although I have yet to find these for myself. A 1902 German edition of a commentary on Song of Songs attributed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century theologian Hippolytus of Rome, in addition to explicitly naming the women at the tomb "Apostel," interprets them as undoing Eve's sin and rendering her an apostle as well. G. Nathanael Bonwetsch, *Hippolytus: Kommentar Zum Hohenlied* (Leipzig, 1902), 68, 70, <https://books.google.com/books?id=TcMUAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=hippolytus+kommentar+zum+Hohenlied&hl=en&sa=X&ei=5NAqT4GwE4eU2AWnqPTxDg&sqi=2&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=hippolytus%20kommentar%20zum%20Hohenlied&f=false>. More recently, and in light of this long tradition, Pope Francis dedicated a new feast day to Mary. Arthur Roche, "Apostle of the Apostles," [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/articolo-roche-maddalena\\_en.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/articolo-roche-maddalena_en.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Eph 2:14, which makes direct reference to this boundary between Jews and Gentiles. See also Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008), 250.

<sup>42</sup> It's even likely that—in the end—the only thing Paul thinks a woman needs on her head is her hair (1 Cor 11:15).

<sup>43</sup> Consider these words by the first century Rabbi Eliezer, which puts the gospel's revolutionary perspective on the theological education of women in stark relief: "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity." Leonard J Swidler, *Biblical Affirmations of Woman* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 154.

not find Paul's enjoinder to female silence found in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 capable of sustaining a blanket dismissal of female teaching and preaching in the church.<sup>44</sup> In short, such an interpretation fails to account for the false teachings which are Paul's chief target in this letter (1 Timothy 1:3) and specifically within the verses in question. In addition, this interpretation also fails to sufficiently account for Paul's enigmatic and even disturbing words in 1 Timothy 2:15, which should serve as a red flag for staking weighty ecclesial claims on its accompanying verses.

Some may suggest that Titus 1:5-9 attests to male-only ecclesial oversight, but this interpretation falls prey to an unsustainable exegesis which translates broad descriptions into direct prescriptions. If we suppose that only men may serve as elders because, in his efforts to sketch a character portrait of an appropriate nominee, Paul's description of marital fidelity employs the phrase "one-woman-man" (μίας γυναίκος ἀνὴρ), then we must also commit to his description of the imagined family life of this nominee as restricting all elders not only to men, but to those married and with grown, Christian children. By this interpretive logic, neither Paul nor Jesus would have made qualifiable elders. This same interpretation is also often applied to 1 Timothy 3. But these texts address marital relations, not church leadership. To suggest that only men can lead the church because a husband is the head of his wife falsely inscribes this marital metaphor onto the church body over whom we are explicitly told that Christ alone is head (Eph 5:25). Moreover, the Bible does not spell out what it means to "submit," and the repeated enjoinder to wives to "submit" to their husbands is ultimately governed by the instruction that all submit to one another (Eph 5:21). In fact, the only concrete scriptural portrait of headship and submission is the same: crucifixion. It is on the cross that Christ displays both the form of his sacrificial headship of the church as well his obedient submission to the Father (cf. Luke 22:42; Matt 20:22, 25-28).

1 Corinthians 14—which offers Paul's most robust account of spiritual giftings rounded out with a list of ecclesial roles—does not indicate that these giftings and roles are distributed by gender. This harmonizes with what we find elsewhere in the biblical canon (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). If such gender discrimination were crucial to the dissemination of the gospel and organization of the church, we should expect such instruction here. Instead, when it comes to ecclesial roles there is concrete New Testament examples of women fulfilling at least the second (Acts 21:9), and perhaps even the first (Rom 16:7). This is to say nothing of the rest of the New Testament's cumulative evidence of women in active leadership roles, including the deacon Phoebe (Rom 16:1), Nympha and her house church (Col 4:15), Priscilla's instructing Apollos (Acts 18:26), and that when Paul was in his church-persecution heyday he found it strategic to

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<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed exposition of my understanding of this text, see Amy J. Erickson, "Difficult Texts: 1 Timothy 2.11–15," *Theology* 122, no. 3 (2019), *forthcoming*.

target women (Acts 8:3).<sup>45</sup> There is also reason to believe that John's second letter is addressed to the female leader of a house church.<sup>46</sup> While some contend that the "elect lady" references the church itself, this does not account for the way in which the "elect lady" is distinguished from "her children" (2 John 1). Moreover, she is addressed in the same manner that John greets the individual Gaius, to whom he writes 3 John.

Of course, each of these instances may be protested. Phoebe may simply indicate that women can be deacons, but not elders; Nympha was likely on hosting the church at her house, not leading it; Priscilla's theological instructions still persisted under Aquila's headship. But these individual explanations presume to defend a perspicuous male-only-leadership account found elsewhere. They also do so pregnant with the incalculable risk that in setting bounds upon women's activity in their service to Christ's body that we hinder their capacity to gift the church with the very offerings which they are commanded to bring her (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 14:26).

What is more, if we read the New Testament as requiring male-only leadership, then it will be essential for us to parse the difference between forms of ministry and leadership in order to assign only the latter to men. But the New Testament does not seem overly concerned with distinguishing forms of ministry from forms of leadership, and we are hard pressed to find more hardened notions of 'offices' and 'ordination' as they are practiced today. It is difficult, in fact, to parse the difference between ministry and leadership as anything but service (Matt 20:25-28). All ecclesial activity exists for the building up of the body (1 Cor 12:7; 14:26). Paul—and scripture as a whole—is vastly less concerned with what activity constitutes leading and what constitutes serving (Matt 23:8-10), what belongs to men and what belongs to women (1 Cor 11:12), as it is concerned with *unity amidst difference* (John 17:21; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-26). Indeed, *this* is what it means to complement one another as male and female, and together to image God (Gen 1:27).

Thus, reading select Pauline texts as restricting women from certain ecclesial activity does not protect a default position of male leadership demanded elsewhere in scripture. Instead, it constructs it in a manner which resists the redemptive arc of the biblical canon, the trajectory of Jesus' ministry, and the portrait of early church life we receive from Paul himself.

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<sup>45</sup> N. T. Wright, "Women's Service in the Church: The Biblical Basis" ('Men, Women and the Church,' St John's College, Durham, 2004), <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/womens-service-in-the-church-the-biblical-basis/>.

<sup>46</sup> This was first brought to my attention in a blog post by New Testament scholar Scot McKnight. Scot McKnight, "The Elect Lady," *Patheos* (blog), September 18, 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2014/09/18/that-elect-lady/>.

## Theological Concerns with Male-exclusive Readings

We arrive now to my deepest concerns with the theological implications demanded by male-exclusive readings. I believe these implications are both unavoidable and grave.

First, male-exclusive readings corrode scripture's ability to address women. If we are to read 1 Timothy 2:11-3:12 as establishing non-negotiable parameters for men to exclusively lead and teach the church, in what way is a female disciple to read and receive Paul's telling Timothy to "command and teach these things" (1 Tim 4:11, NIV), to "watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Tim 4:16, NIV), and to "guard what has been entrusted in your care" (1 Tim 6:20, NIV)? This must be a word only for men. In fact, I wonder how she is able to read 1 Timothy—a letter from one male leader of the church to another male leader of the church about how to be a male leader of the church—at all. Once this reading is taken as the one to which scripture is to be subordinated, men command a dangerous monopoly that imposes a filter on God's word; she is unsure of what portions of any of scripture are addressed to her.<sup>47</sup> These doubts cloud the reality that Christ serves as her sole mediator (1 Tim 2:5).

Second, my deepest concern with male-exclusive readings is not the manner in which they limit the freedom of women, but of God. Male-exclusive readings imply this of the prospect of women filling roles of leading and preaching in the church: God's Spirit should never move through his church in this way; God's Word should never appoint such a mouthpiece. But if scripture indicates that God's anointing of women to preach to, shepherd, or exhort his people might result in skepticism, resistance, or disgust on the part of God's people, then such a response is consistent with what we already know to be true of the scandalous nature of the gospel of Christ (Luke 24:11; 1 Cor 1:21-25). Nevertheless, such a reaction resists a scriptural understanding of the Spirit (John 3:8) and Word of God, who appoints whatever mouthpiece he ordains (Exodus 15:20; Judges 2:16; 4:4; 2 Kings 22:13ff; Esther 4:14), no matter how asinine (Num 22:28). What male-exclusive readings ultimately exclude is the freedom and power of God to deploy his people as he sees fit (Eph 4:11-13).

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<sup>47</sup> I find this especially true for those who maintain that women should be barred not only from positions of ecclesial oversight, but from leading and speaking in worship. In order to sustain such a reading, the word *αδελφοι*, usually rendered "siblings" or "brothers and sisters" throughout Paul's letters, must be translated as strictly "brothers" in 1 Cor 14:20. Like collapsing dominoes, this makes us wonder when and whether *any* of the other instances of *αδελφοι* are to include women, not only in Corinthians (e.g. 1 Cor 12:1; 14:6) but throughout the canon (e.g. Matt 7:4; Rom 12:1; Heb 2:11). Scripture's liberty to address women crumbles as a consequence.

## Conclusion

What I have requested is that when we bring Paul's words to bear on our understanding of women and men's participation in Christ's body, that they be tempered by the rest of scripture,<sup>48</sup> sobered by the text's parameters, and leavened by what we know to be true of God's will and ways. I hope that the reader will now at least appreciate, if not fully agree with, my concern that male-exclusive readings risk restraining Christ's body in a manner which threatens to attenuate connection to our head, "from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow" (Col 2:19, NIV).

Scripture is clear that there persists a real, created difference between men and women, and it is only together that humanity images God. Men and women complement one another, and it is precisely because men and women are complementary that they should shoulder shared and undifferentiated service within the body of Christ. By creating and maintaining male-exclusive domains in the life of God's people, we undercut the very principle of sexual complementarity which the church must uphold in order to image God. Man alone does not image God. Only Christ does.

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<sup>48</sup> Including 2 Peter 3:16, which gives us biblical warrant for submitting our reading of Paul to the rest of the biblical canon.

## Part IV: Ordination Stories

## Ordination Stories: Rev. Katie Fowler

“Sorry, Katie, change of plans,” he said.

I sat there, frozen, watching the scene unfold.

In that moment, I was supposed to be making my way to the top of the platform to preach, but instead this man took the mic and interrupted the service. He proceeded to share why he believed women should, in fact, not be allowed to preach.

I was in my second year of seminary. I was also serving as youth pastor at my church in Simi Valley. The church itself was sort of ambivalent towards women in ministry. It was Thanksgiving weekend, the senior pastor was out of town, and I had been asked to preach.

What’s interesting is, at this point in my life, I still had questions about women in church leadership. Certainly, I had questions about my own call.

Years earlier, when I was in college (go Gators), I was first introduced to some of the Scripture passages that, on face value, seem to prohibit women from serving in church leadership or that seemed to put women in a sort of second-class position. I wasn’t sure what to do with it all. At first I wrestled with the question, “Does Jesus hate women?”

In his kindness, God gave me the opportunity to study this question in a more in-depth manner (of all places- at a state university as a for credit independent study—quite a gracious opportunity on God’s part!)

In my study, I saw for myself the radical welcome Jesus extended to women. How the actions of Jesus were so incredibly subversive in a patriarchal culture. How he was so affirming of the dignity of women.

It was an important starting point—a crucial starting point in my journey. How does God view me *as a woman*? And while I still did not believe that women were called to leadership, I *did* feel called to ministry. Sensing the Lord’s leading, I eventually made plans to move to Southern California and start at Fuller Seminary.

I joke around that it took all three years of seminary for me to come around to the idea of ordination and say, “yes,” to the Lord.

The first year I saw women who were clearly called. I remember attending an event where a panel of women shared their stories of being called into ministry. A common theme amongst that panel was that they initially rejected the idea that God could be calling them to pastoral leadership, but God led them to this place of saying yes.

The second year I wrestled with my own sense of calling. It was this Thanksgiving weekend, as the gentleman interrupted the worship service, that I remember feeling an incredible sense of peace from the Lord. I sat there as he spoke thinking, “When he is done, I will get up and preach.” And when I did eventually walk to the front, I told the



congregation that I approached this task with fear and trembling. Then I preached the Word of God.

Ironically (and again, graciously) the Lord used that disruptive moment to reveal to me that He was for me. Not dismayed as I got up to preach. Not ready to strike me down for my actions. But *for* me.

My journey continued. Wonderful professors at Fuller encouraged me. They saw something I was reluctant to see. I remember my preaching professor saying to me, “You are so afraid you are being disobedient if you pursue ordination; what if you are being disobedient if you don’t?”

My third year I took a class on 1 Corinthians. I was “randomly” assigned some of the passages where Paul discusses women. This class helped me understand the redemptive arc of Scripture. How what was lost in the fall was being remade in Christ Jesus. This was the final piece I needed to be able to say, “yes,” to ordination. To understand how to faithfully read Scripture. I had seen women modeling leadership and sharing their call stories, I was processing my own sense of call, but I needed to know that a faithful reading of God’s Word could lead me to say yes.

After all this, I was ready to begin the ordination process. But I was still somewhat embarrassed by it. At times I felt I needed to explain myself, or even hide it from my friends who disagreed with me.

Then, after graduation, I got a chance to intern at First Pres Colorado Springs. I saw women and men serving side by side in pastoral ministry. It was the first time I had ever witnessed first-hand a woman serving as a pastor in a local church. And this was huge for me—seeing Jennifer Holz, Sara Singleton, and Nancy Fox faithfully living out their callings. (Highlighting the incredible importance of women modeling pastoral leadership for younger women.)

There at First Pres, I had incredible mentors who encouraged me. I can’t state enough how important this was. The people around me helped me hear God’s call. Even before I was ready to hear it.

This was true all along the way. Before I went to seminary, it was Jerry Kasberg and Kevin Pound at Mandarin Presbyterian (my home church) who encouraged me to look again at Scripture to really see what Paul and others were saying. It was my session liaison at Mandarin, Francis Berry, who took me out to lunch whenever I was home in Jacksonville and encouraged me in my seminary journey. And then after seminary, at First Pres Colorado Springs, in large part because of the community around me, I began to really believe that God was calling me to pastoral ministry.

My journey towards ordination was punctuated with me saying, “no” at various points along the way. I just couldn’t see how God was possibly calling me to be a pastor. But God in His kindness and mercy did not give up on me. God indeed had a different set of plans.

For God is faithful. God who calls us to himself, God who calls us to join His work in the world. To be sure, there are often voices around us that try to counter or question the call of God on our lives. But thanks be to God for the people He has put in our lives who help us to see what God is doing, who help us to hear God's voice, and who help us to say yes to God's call.

I believe the Lord has uniquely positioned ECO in this generation to be champions for women and men serving side by side. To be a place where the gifts and callings of women are celebrated equally with that of their male co-laborers. To be a community, where the in-breaking Kingdom is winsomely and wondrously revealed in this way— indeed all things made new in Jesus Christ, including our relationships as men and women, and our participation *together* in God's Kingdom.

For such a time as this may we faithfully point to the new thing God is doing in Jesus Christ. May we be agents of new creation proclaiming that Jesus is ushering in new life here and now.

"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Galatians 3:28

## Part V: ECO Doctrine, Polity, and FAQs

## ECO Doctrine and Polity

ECO's Constitution contains very simple teachings on gender roles. The *Essential Tenets* III.D explain ECO's doctrinal position as follows:

We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ's offices within the world beyond the church.

ECO *Polity* assumes this doctrinal basis for ordination, and thus only mentions gender difference in speaking of the Session's responsibilities.

1.0603c says,

Plan for and provide an effective disciple-making, ministry-discernment process for the congregation and new believers, equipping them to be missional Christians and being faithful to nurture them into spiritual maturity and significant ministry. Provide for and nurture the common life of the congregation; receive and dismiss covenant partners; exercise oversight of all programs and finances of the congregation; train, examine, ***ordain and install those men and women chosen to serve as elders and deacons***, lead and teach the congregation in matters of stewardship and Christian living; direct the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation; bear witness against error in doctrine and practice; and serve in judicial matters pertaining to the congregation as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.

In addition, ECO's *Essential Tenets* explain the sexual expectations of all believers in its exegesis of the seventh commandment:

We therefore hold one another accountable to:... 7.maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant (III.E.7).

## FAQs

### *What does ECO believe about the ordination of women?*

ECO believes that men and women are alike called to all forms of ministry. ECO does not hold to any gender distinctions for any roles within the church.

### *What do the Confessional Standards say on this issue?*

None of the Confessional Standards of ECO make any comments about gender in Christ, or about restrictions of women in ministry. Although previous documents like the Scot's Confession or the Second Helvetic Confession did specifically deny women places in the church, the Westminster Standards do not mention the issue. While it is not reasonable to argue from silence, those who wrote the documents, particularly the Scottish representatives, must have been aware that they were leaving out what the Scots Confession had explained clearly. The result is that none of ECO's official guiding theology documents offers theological guidance on questions of gender roles.

### *What if I disagree with the ordination of women to a specific office (e.g. pastor, elder), but promise to not speak of it?*

ECO requires that all of its officers "receive, adopt, and be bound by the Essential Tenets of ECO" (Polity 2.0103c). Our Essential Tenets are not optional, and we do not allow for exceptions. This document is intended to be our source of unity and mutual trust. Therefore, full affirmation of the ordination of women to any and all position of ministry is required by ECO.

Any male officer who does not affirm the ordination of women but chooses to remain silent about the issue silently delegitimizes his colleagues in ECO. Silent discrimination does not demonstrate the gospel of reconciliation in which Christ has brought down the walls of division between men and women. In ECO, this issue is not a political choice for personal opinion, but rooted in our understanding of the teachings of Scripture.

### *This issue does not seem like a core belief to the Christian faith. It does not impact one's salvation, so why does ECO not tolerate diversity of beliefs on this issue?*

We are not saved by doctrine, but by Christ. Doctrine does not serve the purpose of saving people. Its purpose is to equip the people of God to rightly know God, speak about God, speak to God, and be unified in Christ. Doctrine, if done well and by mature followers of Christ, creates unity by leading us to the good news of Jesus Christ. Therefore, any doctrine that serves to divide a church in its very constitution and structure cannot be permitted. While the kingdom of God is full of those who hold to masculine

authority and those who deny divine gender roles, a human institution like a denomination cannot rightly operate if some of its officers are constantly aware of colleagues who may hold their ordination as sinful. To tolerate diversity of belief on this issue is to invite disunity and distrust. To tolerate diversity here is really to officially affirm a practical hierarchy of men, which this book explains as false.

*Are Deacons and Elders Required to Affirm the Ordination of Women?*

Yes. Elders and deacons have the similar ordination vows as pastors. In the hiring of pastors it is not legitimate to discriminate against women. The Session is the leadership of a church. The covenant partners do not have the prerogative in ECO to reject the hiring of a pastor or election of elders or deacons based solely on gender.

*Is ECO's position of ordaining women a slippery slope to the affirmation of homosexuality, gender fluidity, or transsexual beliefs?*

ECO affirms the leadership of women based on Scripture, not on cultural trends. God created male and female, and neither is superior than the other. Being a woman is not a sin, and is never considered as such in Scripture. Choosing homosexual behaviour, identity, or lifestyle is understood as sin in both Old and New Testaments.

There are numerous Evangelicals who affirm the unity of male and female in Christ but do not affirm LGBTQ choices as biblically defensible.

That said, in our culture this slippery slope has proved to be true in some cases. Those who were motivated to the equality of women in leadership because of a desire to modernize the church to contemporary moral standards have now moved to affirm the equality of all who self-identify as LGBTQ, in line with the culture. ECO does not affirm the ordination of women because of cultural pressure, but because we believe it is the teaching of the Word of God.

For more on this issue, see our chapter on Gender and Sex.

## Suggested Resources

- Belleville, Linda L., et. al. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Lee-Barnwell, Michelle. *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Smit, Laura A. *Loves Me, Loves Me Not: The Ethics of Unrequited Love*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.
- Smit, Laura A., Stephen E. Fowl. *Judges and Ruth: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018.
- Stackhouse, John G. *Partners in Christ: A Conservative Case for Egalitarianism*. Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2015.
- Westfall, Cynthia Long. *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016.