

*My Neighbor's Pastor is a*

# *Woman!*

*What do I do?!?!?*



Travis Collins Ph.D.



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## *What do I do?!?!?*

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Spring, 2017

Unfortunately, lots of us decide what we believe (often based on what people around us believe) and then seek biblical justification for our positions. We tend to consult the Bible simply to *confirm* our assumptions, rarely allowing Scripture to *challenge* those assumptions. That was true of me for a long time regarding the role of women in the church.

In the summer of 1998, however, I decided to begin an earnest study of the topic of women in ministry and church leadership. I took several books with me when our family went to my in-laws' lake house. Early in the mornings, late at nights, and between wiffle ball games and fishing expeditions with the kids, I devoured books on the subject—books written from various viewpoints. The result of those days of study, and weeks of study to follow, was a new perspective on the matter.

I discovered, for instance, that this is not a liberal/conservative issue. Interestingly, a number of denominations considered more conservative than Baptists—Church of the Nazarene, Church of God, Free Methodists, The Salvation Army, etc.—have women as pastors. The fastest growing churches in the world are charismatic churches (generally conservative in theology), and in most charismatic churches the legitimacy of women ministers is unquestioned.

I found scholars who hold a high view of Scripture and also believe the Bible allows women to serve in ministry roles. Dan Gentry, retired professor at Southwestern Baptist Seminary, wrote an article about women in ministry, the title of which was, “Can you Believe in Inerrancy AND Equality?” In his article he answered his own question in the affirmative.

I have become convinced that the role of women in the church is a matter of *interpretation* of biblical texts, not a litmus test for orthodoxy. Two Christians can agree on the authority and truthfulness of Scripture and yet disagree on the role of women in the church.

Of course, the best approach to this topic is to look at what the Bible actually says, so that's what we'll do. We will look first (and briefly) at Galatians 3:28 and ask if, perhaps, that verse is the foundational text regarding women in ministry. Then we will look at the many instances of female leaders in Scripture. Before moving to a conclusion, we will wrestle with the two primary "prohibitive" texts, 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14.

## Galatians 3:28

Maybe this is the most important word on the matter (and I think it is):

***"In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).***

This verse often is interpreted as having to do with our spiritual standing in Christ, not with roles in the church. I certainly would concur that the passage clearly describes the level ground at the foot of the cross and reminds us that there are no barriers (including gender) to salvation. But let's consider for a few moments the possibility that this verse also has a word, maybe even a *foundational* word, to say about leadership roles.<sup>i</sup>

F. F. Bruce wrote, about Galatians 3:28, "Paul states the basic principle here; if restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Corinthians 14:34 or 1 Timothy 2:11ff., they are to be understood in relation to Galatians 2:28, not vice versa."<sup>ii</sup>

Let's not miss what Bruce is suggesting: We *start* with Galatians 3:28 and interpret other verses having to do with gender *in light of*

Galatians 3:28. If Bruce is right, then Galatians 3:28 is the foundational, guiding statement regarding women in ministry. Other texts, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 (which we will explore below) would be “exceptions to the rule.” In other words, we would follow Galatians 3:28 except in those situations in which, for distinct purposes similar to the ones reflected in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, it would not be appropriate for women to be ministers. (For example, if I were going to plant a church in a Muslim city, it might be a poor strategic decision to begin with a woman minister.)<sup>iii</sup>

I have come to believe Galatians 3:28 is the foundational text in the discussion of the role of women in the church, and thus should guide our conversation on the topic. Not everyone, however, will be convinced of that. So, let’s look at what could be even more compelling evidence for some people—the long list of female spiritual leaders in the Bible

## Women leaders in the Bible

Those who reject the idea of female church leaders and ministers have to explain why there are so many women in prominent roles on the pages of Scripture. Consider the following:

- Miriam was Moses’ companion in leadership and a prophetess<sup>iv</sup> (Exodus 15:20).
- Deborah, who was known best as a Judge (the political and spiritual leader of Israel), was also “a prophetess...leading Israel at that time” (Judges 4:4).
- Huldah was a prophetess, through whom God spoke (2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34).
- Noadiah was named as a prophetess (Nehemiah 6:14).
- Isaiah’s wife was called “prophetess” (See Isaiah 8:1-3).

- Joel reported God’s declaration, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Joel 2:28).
- Luke 2:36 says, “There was also a prophet, Anna...”
- On the Day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed God’s Spirit had emerged with new power and a new role, and quoted from Joel the words, “your sons and daughters will prophesy” (Acts 2:17). He didn’t say, “They will teach children’s classes, or lead Bible studies.” Joel’s words were repeated by Peter, “Your sons *and daughters* will *prophesy*” (speak forth God’s word).
- Priscilla taught Apollos, and is considered by some to have been a co-pastor with her husband, Aquilla. Paul called her a “fellow worker in Christ” (Romans 16:3).
- Phillip’s four daughters were prophetesses (Acts 21:9), and the folks in the early church didn’t seem to be bothered in the least by that.
- Paul referred to Euodia and Syntyche as “women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel...my co-workers” (Philippians 4:2-3) indicating that their aid was in the proclamation of the good news, not just making finger sandwiches.

In fact, when Paul admonishes his readers to “submit to everyone who joins in the work” (1 Corinthians 16:16), the phrase “joins in the work” is the verb form of the same phrase used for Euodia and Syntyche—“co workers”—in Philippians 4:3. So Paul is encouraging his readers to submit to people like Euodia and Syntheche. These two ladies were obviously church leaders.

- Phoebe was a deacon (Romans 16:1 reads, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon [Greek, *diakonon*] of the church in Cenchreae.”) Moreover, the word *prostasis* is used to refer to Phoebe in the next verse (Romans 16:2), and that word designates some role in the management and oversight of the church. (They are to do whatever she may “need” from them.)

- Many of the house churches are identified with women. Though the texts don't call these women "pastors," they certainly had some sort of leadership role in these house churches that perhaps didn't even have formal pastors. Those women are Apphia (Philemon 2), Nympha (Colossians 4:15), Priscilla (1 Corinthians 16:9; Romans 16:3), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40 and Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11).
- 1 Timothy 5:1-2 reads, "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity." The actual Greek language translated "older women" is "presbutera," the female version of *women elders*. Is Paul talking about older women (as in age) or is he talking about female elders (as a role in the church)? We can't be sure. Some argue this is indeed an affirmation of females holding the office of elder (overseers).
- **Junia deserves special mention, for she is listed along with the apostles ("Greet Andronicus and Junia...for they are outstanding among the apostles," Romans 16:7).**

While Junia was not among the original twelve, she was a Christian leader, perhaps an itinerant missionary, with the spiritual authority that came with such a role.

Some have suggested that this is should be translated as a masculine name, Junias, but that suggestion appears to be an attempted re-writing of the text based on one's presuppositions about gender roles in the church.<sup>v</sup> Junia (female) was a common name; Junias (the male counterpart) was not. Furthermore, Origen, a second century theologian, and Chrysostom, a fourth century theologian, both spoke of Junia as a female apostle. **In short, Junia was an apostle—a female apostle. And to be named among the apostles was a big deal in the New Testament church.**<sup>vi</sup>

## Where does the weight of the evidence point us?

The number of biblical texts that affirm women in church leadership (such as the ones we have seen here) far outnumber the texts that potentially impose restrictions on women in leadership. Why would we not assume then, that the *norm* in the Kingdom of King Jesus is that gender is not a factor in ministry? Why would we not assume that the “restrictive” texts are exceptions to the rule, and applicable only in limited contexts—contexts similar to those particular writings?

J. I. Packer is a conservative Christian scholar. He acknowledged,

*While (we cannot) claim that all the exegetical questions tackled have now been finally resolved, I think the New Testament papers in particular make it evident that the burden of proof regarding the exclusion of women from the office of teaching and ruling within the congregation now lies on those who maintain the exclusion rather than on those who challenge it.*<sup>vii</sup>

Packer’s point is noteworthy: The burden of proof lies with those who would exclude women from leadership, not with those who would include them. James Brownson makes a similar point: “Those who want to insist that the Bible requires women never to exercise authority over men are forced into some striking exegetical gymnastics to account for this direct evidence of women in leadership in the New Testament texts.”<sup>viii</sup>

And as Stanley Gundry explained, “I find it easier to live with the unresolved problems of egalitarianism (gender not being a factor when it comes to leadership) than the problems of hierarchicalism (men in a hierarchical role over women).” Gundry went on to say that the problems of hierarchicalism are so serious they “call into question the very unity of the Bible.”<sup>ix</sup>

## “Exceptions”

There are those who would argue that, even if the female names listed above are indeed biblical examples of women ministers, they are *exceptions*. Well, let’s grant that. Let’s grant, for the sake of argument, that the women leaders in the Bible are exceptions. So, even if they *are* exceptions...even if the Bible speaks approvingly of even *one* female minister...even one exception rules out any blanket prohibition of women ministers, does it not?

This seems clear to me: In the Old Testament women had roles of leadership, even if they were the exceptions. With the coming of Jesus and the writing of the New Testament, women's opportunities expanded, and no longer were/are there limitations according to gender.

Leadership and ministry in the century after the New Testament included both men and women.<sup>x</sup> By 200 AD, however, church leaders were all male. The formalization of authority in bishops somehow resulted in all the bishops being men. We can only surmise why females were excluded from those roles.

## The “prohibitive” texts

Here I will deal primarily with two texts—the two passages that are believed by many to prohibit the service of women in ministry and leadership—1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Reading these two texts in isolation<sup>xi</sup> would lead one to believe women should be seen and not heard in church. But are we truly being faithful to Scripture when we take the position that females should have a subordinate, even silent, role in our congregations? I contend that the answer is “No.”

It is helpful to remember that the New Testament letters were written to specific people in specific contexts. Without question, there are universal, eternal truths in the New Testament—mandates, principles and guidelines that are applicable in all times

and places. I want to be clear about that. Yet, some detailed instructions found in the New Testament seem to have been intended for the specific people and places to which they were written. It is helpful to remember that these words from 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 might indeed have been intended as correctives for specific, problematic situations, not as universal, timeless instructions for church practice.

We must be careful here, of course, not to flippantly dismiss clear biblical guidelines by claiming that they are applicable only to the original readers and not applicable to us. Nevertheless, it is faulty scholarship to apply to our contexts words that were not *intended for* our contexts.

Regarding the “prohibitions” of women in ministry, there are several cultural realities that need to be considered. These cultural realities might not “explain away” the prohibitions, but they certainly give us cause to think.

Let’s take these two texts one by one.

## **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**

*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*

Did God actually inspire Paul to limit the speech of women in the Corinthian church? In all churches? If he *did* intend to tell women not to talk in the Corinthian church (and I’m not convinced he did), why would he do that? Here are some possibilities...

- Maybe Paul was concerned about “appearances”—the perception of the church by outsiders. Perhaps Paul thought a public role for women in the new church would paint the Christian movement in a bad light. For example, Judaism, the “parent” of the Christian church, did not allow women a public role in worship. Furthermore, “proper” women in the

Mediterranean culture were expected to be in submissive, quiet roles. Cults that had given women public roles had been criticized as appearing to advocate immorality.<sup>xii</sup>

- We must remember that the New Testament was written in the context of dramatic transition and uncharted waters. Women were granted unprecedented freedom in this new faith that came to be known as “Christian.”<sup>xiii</sup> It has been suggested that the women referred to in 1 Corinthians 14 were misusing their newfound freedom in Christ. It could be that the women were the ones over-emphasizing the charismatic gifts about which Paul cautions in the first section of 1 Corinthians 14.

Perhaps the fact that Corinth was home to a number of rather wild religious movements was the background of this apparent prohibition. It could be that many new female Christians brought their rather excessive and disorderly practices into the church. Maybe it was specifically to these rowdy women, and not to all women in all congregations for all times, that Paul was speaking.

- The New Testament was written on the “frontier”—the cutting edge of the expansion of Christianity, and should be read through a missiological lens. I believe if Paul is indeed placing these restrictions on women, the restrictions are part of Paul’s missions strategy of “becoming all things to all people so that we might win some” (1 Corinthians 9:20-22).

It seems to me that, at best, Paul is making accommodations to the local culture so as not to hinder the advancement of the gospel in those locales.

- Another common explanation of the restrictions Paul placed on women is that women in his day were generally far less educated than the men. (This would have been particularly true about religious education for those who had come out of Judaism.) It simply was disruptive for men to be explaining, in elementary and time-consuming discussions, matters relating to church and theology to the

women during worship services. Furthermore, women's lack of education might have made them susceptible to heresies. So maybe, although we can't say for sure, this apparent restriction on women is related to the illiterate, inquisitive and disruptive women of first century Corinth.

### **It might be that Paul was not actually calling for women's silence in 1 Corinthians 14.**

- We know women *did* speak in New Testament churches. Even in this very letter—the First Letter to the Corinthians—Paul instructed women to cover their heads *when* (not *if*) they prayed or prophesied.
- It is interesting to see the word Paul chose here to describe the way the women in question were talking. Although he could have used other Greek words (i.e. *lego*, or *aipon*) to describe “speaking,” he used the word, *laleo*, which, according to Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon, most commonly means, “chatter, babble.” I'm not enough of a Greek student to make too much of this, but it is possible, and it has been suggested, that he's talking about chattering and babbling, not ordinary speech.
- It is important to interpret this text in its context. It falls in a section dealing with “order” in the church. The previous verse, verse 33, includes this statement: “God is not a God of disorder but of peace.” That gives us a hint as to what will follow—words about “order.” So, it is possible, maybe even likely, that Paul was not banning all speech on the part of females. Perhaps we was not at all forbidding their questions, their songs or their prayers. Rather, he might simply have been clamping down on disruptions.

So there are legitimate reasons why God, through the pen of Paul, would have limited the speech of women in the Corinthian church.

One might argue that there are lots of “perhapses” and “maybes” in the section above, and I have to admit that is true. Nevertheless, one would also have to admit that there is lots of evidence mounting in favor of the interpretation that Paul was not demanding that all women in all churches be silent.

Yet there is more for us to consider...

**If we don't believe the Bible contradicts itself, we have to think carefully about what Paul says.**

In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul seems to have instructed women to be completely silent in the churches. Yet, only three chapters earlier in that same letter, he wrote that *when* women pray or prophesy publicly they are to cover their heads (1 Corinthians 11:5), obviously giving his implicit approval to their public speaking.

Either Paul contradicts, in Chapter 14, what he wrote earlier, in Chapter 11 (something I would argue he didn't do), or there is something culturally specific about his instructions in Chapter 14.

James Plueddemann asked, “Does God's inerrant and fully inspired Bible contradict itself when it says on the one hand that women should keep silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34), while on the other hand that they should cover their heads when they prophesy? (11:5)?”<sup>xiv</sup> Pluedemann clearly believes the answer is “No,” and I believe Pluedemann is right.

It is worth noting that many scholars believe 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 actually reflects a quote taken from an earlier letter written to Paul from the church in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 7:1). In other words, some people believe Paul was simply quoting something written to him from the Corinthian church members, not issuing a directive.

In light of the evidence, it appears to me that 1 Corinthians 14 is not a very helpful text if one is looking for unqualified support for keeping women out of ministry and leadership.

## 1 Timothy 2:11-15

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

Bill Self was right in observing that dealing with this second chapter of Timothy “is like trying to untangle barbed wire.”

Within that passage are found significant challenges, including the following:

- Verse 11, first of all, would have been shocking to many readers. In Paul’s world, women were not generally allowed to learn. So to promote the education of women at all was somewhat revolutionary. But, beyond that, he says they should learn in quietness and full submission.
- The word used here for “quiet” (verses 11 & 12) is *hesuchia*. In Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon the first definition listed for *hesuchia* is “quietness, rest.” Bauer’s goes on to explain that *hesuchia* refers to “peace and harmony,” and an “undisturbed life.” I don’t know enough about Greek to make the argument, but one might suppose that in verse 11 he was talking about their right to study undisturbed, rather than instructing the women to just sit down and listen.
- In verse 12, the phrase, “to have authority over” (Greek, *authentein*) is somewhat confusing. The usual Greek word for “to have authority over,” is *exousia*. Here, however, Paul uses a

very rare Greek word—*authentein*. I understand that in the Greek language the word *authentein* was most often used in a negative sense—as in one who is domineering, or seizing a leadership role by inappropriate means. *Authentein* is translated in Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon as “to have authority, to domineer over someone,” and perhaps it was against browbeating and authoritarianism, not female leadership, that Paul was writing.<sup>xv</sup>

- One of the oddities of this text is Paul’s statement about Adam being created first and Eve being the one deceived. Perhaps it was the local (Ephesian) form of Gnosticism that required this statement. According to Kevin Conner,

*“Ephesus was the world centre of paganism governed spiritually by the female deity Artemis whom the Romans called Diana. The cult of Artemis taught the superiority of the female and advocated female domination of the male...Also present in Ephesus was a contingent of Jewish gnostics...Gnosticism taught that Eve was the originator of life.”<sup>xvi</sup>*

Conner stated further: *“Paul sets the creation order aright, refuting the Gnostics and the cult of Diana, who claimed that Eve was the originator of man, that woman was created first, and that man is of the woman and is therefore dependent upon, and inferior to, her.”<sup>xvii</sup>*

Had those pagan ideas influenced some of the new Christian women in the church? It is certainly conceivable that they had, and likewise conceivable that it was against a radical brand of feminism, not the responsible exercise of leadership, that Paul was warning.

- If we are going to interpret verses 11 - 12 literally, then do we not also have to interpret verse 15 literally? After all, only three verses separate these statements. In verse 15 we read, “But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” Candidly, I don’t know how to interpret verse 15. Do you? So, how can

we be so sure we know how to interpret a phrase about women and authority that occurs in the same paragraph?

And what about the verses that precede verses 11-12? In verses 9-10 we read that women should not braid their hair or wear gold or pearls or expensive clothes! Do we not take that literally? Maybe it goes like this:

Verses 9-10 = Not literal; Verses 11-12 = Literal; Verses 13-15 = Not Literal.

Is that a sound method of biblical interpretation? I think not.

In summary, why would we not assume that this entire section of Paul's letter to Timothy is shaped by its cultural context? Why would we assume that only the instructions about fashion are applicable only to the immediate hearers of this letter? Why wouldn't we assume that the instructions about women's roles in church are shaped by the context as well?

Again, how can the command to remain silent be reconciled with the obvious public instances of women praying and prophesying in other New Testament texts? I don't see how they can. Therefore I do not find in 1 Timothy 2 justification for limiting the role of women in church.

## **Summary of the “prohibitive” texts**

We can see, then, that there are lots of questions surrounding these two “prohibitive” texts. Was Paul, for example, really telling the women to be silent? Or was he, rather, telling them not to babble and not to disrupt the worship?

Or, if Paul *was* telling the women to be silent, and if he was telling them not to take leadership roles, was he laying down a mandate for all churches for all times? Or was he, rather, giving instructions only to those original readers because of their unique situations?

It seems to me that any restrictions Paul might have placed on the women in Ephesus and Corinth are not strictly applicable in all contexts. I believe any potential restrictions were intended for those particular places and that particular time.

Yet I have to acknowledge that this approach—considering the context and the overall flow of the New Testament—is fraught with danger. If we are not careful, we will wrongfully dismiss biblical truths as not applicable to us purely because they were written in another place and time. In fact, I believe people have done that in regards to some hot button moral issues of our day and I have been critical of that.

It is far too easy to dismiss hard teachings as merely pertinent to a distant context and not applicable today. It is far too easy to assume that the biblical writers “really” meant what we *hope* they meant so as not to challenge our preconceived notions.

All that being said, it is my conviction that, in this case, the Bible’s restrictive words about women’s roles in church really are shaped by the culture of the particular texts. Thus I believe that if, indeed, the New Testament places limits on women those limits are suitable only in those particular settings, not universally applicable. I believe that conclusion is based on a careful, honest reading of the New Testament.

While someone might offer answers to all these questions I’ve raised about the “prohibitive” texts, the abundance of these ambiguous issues ought to cause us to think twice about stubborn positions.

Moreover, not only are there complications in interpreting these “prohibitive” verses; there are multiple examples in the pages of Scripture of women in positions of spiritual leadership!

It seems wrong to take intolerant stands on the issue of women in ministry based on one’s interpretation of difficult texts, particularly if that interpretation is simply a reflection of one’s assumptions. It appears to me that when we look at Paul’s writings through the lens of his culture and compare “prohibitive” texts to the overall

flow of the New Testament, we cannot restrict women from roles of ministry and leadership.

## “But what about...?”

In addition to these two so-called prohibitive texts, there are other biblical teachings that must be addressed before we declare that the Bible allows women to exercise church leadership.

## “What about women as ‘helpers’ to men?”

*“God recognized that it was not good for man to be alone, and so he created woman—a helper (ezer, Hebrew) suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18).*

It is easy to see how one might read Genesis 2:18 and assume women are intended to be subordinate, in assistant-type roles, in relation to men. However, this is one of the many examples in which the Bible interprets the Bible. In other pages of Scripture, you see, the Hebrew word *ezer*, the word translated “helper” (“helpmeet in KJV) is used to describe God Himself!

Here are three examples:

Exodus 18:4

*...and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.”*

Psalm 40:17

*But as for me, I am poor and needy;  
may the Lord think of me.*

*You are my help (ezer) and my deliverer;  
you are my God, do not delay.*

Psalm 33:20

*We wait in hope for the LORD;  
he is our help (ezer) and our shield.*

*Ezer*, then, describes the one who has the power to aid another. Thus, the image in Genesis is not that of man needing a subordinate assistant, but of man being such a helpless creature he had to have the support of a woman!

**What about the “complementary” roles of men and women rooted in the creation story?** Don’t those roles represent God’s intentions that males be in leadership?

Well, let’s take another look at the creation story. In fact, in Genesis’ earliest description of man and woman they are equals in every way—co-leaders, under God, of the created order. Then came the fall and a re-ordering of things. After the fall God said to Eve, as quoted in Genesis 3:16, “I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children in anguish. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will rule over you.” (Let’s ignore the temptation here to try and figure out what God meant by introducing pain into childbirth, and stick with our topic of husbands and wives and who is in submission to whom.)

So *after the fall* there is a re-ordering of roles between husbands and wives. But note that 1) the pages of the Old Testament contain stories of Deborah, Miriam, Huldah and others who were spiritual leaders, so God did not strictly prohibit women’s leadership even under the Old Covenant; and 2) Immediately after the fall God began the work of redeeming fallen creation. That work of redemption came to its climax in the coming of Jesus, the Christ. In Jesus there comes a new day, a day in which there is no longer male and female in God’s eyes (Galatians 3:28).<sup>xviii</sup>

I cannot explain why God re-ordered the roles of husbands and wives after the fall. Nevertheless, I believe God’s ideal is that people serve Him according to their callings and giftings, regardless of their gender.

## **What about the man as head of the house? Doesn't that imply that males should have authority in the church as well?**

I can neither ignore nor fully understand what the Bible says about the roles of husband and wife, and the impact of those potential roles on the question of women in ministry.

So, what about the husband as the head of the house? Let's look at two verses.

*Ephesians 5:23, "The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior."*

*1 Corinthians 11:3, "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."*

People who understand Greek a lot better than I do wrestle with the meaning of *kephale*, most often translated "head" in the New Testament. There is broad consensus that *kephale* does not mean "boss." Some believe it should be translated "source," as in the beginning of a trail or river. Those who support the idea of "source" sometimes point to Adam being the first one created and Eve coming from his "rib." Another common translation of *kephale* is "honored" or "prominent," which would make sense given the patriarchal, male-dominated culture of the biblical era.

Of course the inclusion of Jesus as "head" of the church does imply leadership, and I don't know how exactly that figures into the discussion of the role of husbands and wives.

Ron Sider believes we cannot equate the role of Christ as "head" with the role of the husband as "head": Sider suggests, "In short, there are many, many ways that the headship of Christ over the church is different from the headship of the husband. Therefore, we dare not assume that ruling and governing are part of the meaning of the husband as head unless the text explicitly says that."<sup>xix</sup>

Yet, as much as I would like to declare that Sider's statement

settles the issue, it does not—at least not for me. I have to acknowledge that this question of male “headship” is a topic about which I have not achieved sufficient understanding.

## **What about women being in submission?**

Ephesians 5:21-25 reads,

*21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

*22 Wives, (submit) to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*

*23 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

*25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

The verb “submit” does not appear in the original Greek in Ephesians 5:22. We have to go back to verse 21 to find the verb. So the two verses together read, literally, something like this: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, to your husbands as to the Lord.” Don’t miss that: the submission of the wife appears in the middle of the idea of *mutual* submission. According to Ephesians 5, then, the spiritual discipline of leadership in a Christian marriage is not for wives only.

Yet in Colossians 3:18 and 2 Peter 3:1 wives are told to submit to their husbands without reference to the “mutual submission” made so clear in Ephesians 5. So, while these three texts are very similar, the Colossians and 2 Peter passages do not seem to be as egalitarian in tone as the Ephesians 5 passage.

Frankly, I haven’t figured all this out. In our marriage, Keri and I haven’t ever had to have that conversation. Let’s just say that if I do have the privilege of leadership, I’ve never had to exercise it in more than three decades.

In a good, healthy, Christian marriage, there is no power struggle, no competition for leadership. I believe we all could agree that the relationship between Christian spouses ought to be based on mutual deference and respect, not male dominance and rule.

The question here is whether the husband's leadership role in the home (if that is, indeed, what the Bible teaches) has any bearing on the discussion of women's roles in church. Some do assume husbands are supposed to be the leaders at home and, by inference, also at church. I simply don't find any convincing evidence of that. For me, what the Bible teaches about gender roles in the home is too inconclusive to use it as evidence that only men should be in authority in the church.

By the way, there are a number of people who do believe in male leadership in marriage but affirm egalitarian roles in the church!<sup>xx</sup>

## **What about the fact that Jesus chose men, not women, in his circle of Twelve?**

It appears to me that Jesus had practical reasons for including only men in his choosing of the Twelve. Both the gender and the number of the apostles symbolized the continuity with God's covenant with Israel. Nevertheless, the Gospels tell story after story of the presence and involvement of women in Jesus' itinerant band of disciples.

## **A Couple of Questions**

### **If the Bible says women should not speak at all in church, why do people argue that they can do everything except be the Senior Pastor?**

I understand that most Baptists would not be comfortable with women pastors—either for biblical or cultural reasons. However,

if the Bible says women are to be silent (note that word, *silent*) in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14, how did we decide women may do *everything* except be the pastor?

The decision to draw the line at pastor seems rather arbitrary given the fact that the Bible says women should be silent and nowhere says that women can do *everything except* be the pastor. A more *consistent* interpretation of Scripture would be to prohibit women from saying (or singing) anything, doing anything (except showing up), and teaching anything (including children).

Most of those who say women should not be ministers or deacons have made their own concessions. They acknowledge that the Bible says women should be silent, but they have decided what they believe “silent” means. “Well, it’s okay for them to sing,” many would say. Or, “it’s okay for them to give a testimony, or to ‘share’; it’s just not appropriate for them to teach.” Or, “they can teach children, but not grown men” (even though children are in their formative years and much more impressionable than grown men). Some would say women can minister but only under the “covering” of a man’s authority. I honestly don’t know where they go in the Bible to get the idea of a male “covering” for females.

In short, I don’t understand how so many people have determined that “be silent” means “Don’t be ordained and don’t be a pastor.”

## **One more question: Why do we go out of our way not to use the word “preach” when referring to ladies?**

One of the most interesting things I’ve seen in churches is how we label what women do behind a podium. They “share.” They “give a talk.” They “speak.” They “bring a Bible study.” A man could do the exact same thing as a woman is doing and we would call it “preaching.” It is as if somehow, for many, not using the “P” word makes it okay for a women to stand in front of people and declare, “Thus says the Lord.” That seems disingenuous.

It would seem to me that if we are going to strictly follow 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, women should be silent. Period. As in “Don’t say *anything*.” As in “Be seen and not heard.”

I’m not suggesting that, mind you. Not at all. I am simply observing what it would look like if we were to follow 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 literally and consistently.

## My personal observations

### **The topic is unnecessarily divisive.**

From the time I entered seminary in 1983 Baptists, the denomination that shaped me, have been divided over this topic. And I mean *bitterly* divided.

The authority of Scripture is an essential topic in the church, and nothing that calls that into question should be swept under the rug. However, we can agree on biblical authority and yet disagree on the role of women in ministry and leadership.

I have to wonder what motivates people to take such a defensive posture on this topic. Why would people so fiercely argue for the male-dominant model of leadership? This really ought to be one of those matters about which we should agree to disagree when necessary, and leave it to local churches.

### **The Bible is frustratingly inconclusive.**

I have weighed the evidence as I see it, and I deeply believe that the Bible does not prohibit, and even affirms, women in ministry and leadership.

Nevertheless, I wish the Bible were more clear on this. There still are counter arguments to my position that I cannot answer to my own satisfaction, much less to the satisfaction of those who hold a

position different from mine.

If this issue were as important as some believe it to be, one would think God would have inspired His writers of Scripture to make it more clear. One would think there would be a strict and unequivocal prohibition against female ministers. In fact, there is not. I would even contend, as I have stated above, that the burden of proof lies with those who would restrict the role of women in the church. Nevertheless, I still find myself wishing for more clarity.

### **Women ministers are undeniably impressive.**

Over the years I have known a number of wonderfully effective female ministers and leaders. Their gifts and their effectiveness are undeniable. It has long been, and still is, my honor and joy to serve alongside female ministers.

### **Restrictions on women are counterproductive**

If the U. S. military could somehow sideline one half of the radicals associated with ISIS, the threat of ISIS would be significantly reduced. Likewise, it has been suggested that by convincing the Church to limit the roles of its females—one half of the Christian “army”—the Enemy has robbed us of significant capacity.

## **Don't miss Acts 2:16-18**

I know I referenced this text earlier, but it is worthy of a quick revisit.

*...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

*“In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.*

*Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.*

There are a couple of things here worthy of note besides the obvious reference to women prophesying. First is the phrase, “in the last days.” We are living “in the last days.” That phrase does not necessarily mean “there are only a few days left until the end of time.” It primarily means, rather, that we live in the era of Jesus—a new chapter in God’s story.

The second phrase worth noting is “On both men and women I will pour out my Spirit.” There is every indication, both here and elsewhere in the New Testament, that the gifts of God’s Spirit are poured out on male and female alike.

Finally, I wanted to be sure I was understanding the word “prophesy,” so I looked up the Greek word for “prophesy,” *prophitessusin*, in Walter Bauer’s *Greek-English Lexicon*, the standard reference for this kind of question. Bauer’s defines *prophitessusin* as 1) “proclaim a divine revelation”; 2) “prophetically reveal what is hidden”; 3) “foretell the future.” And Bauer makes specific reference to Acts 2:16-18, applying the first definition (“proclaim a divine revelation”) to that text that speaks of young women.

Thus I believe that to prevent women from “proclaiming a divine revelation” is to violate the message of the New Testament

## The best we can do

In dealing with complex issues, all we can do is our best. And sometimes the best we can do is say, “it *seems*.”

In Acts 15:28 there is a fascinating line: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (NIV). *Seemed*. I’d never paid attention to that word *seemed* until John Ortberg pointed it out in his book, *The Places You’ll Go*.

This was an historic moment. The Christian movement was in its infancy. The second church in history had been birthed out of the first church in history. Their decisions would impact not only those two original churches but *all* churches. You and I never have been in a business meeting or church conference of such import as this one. They were shaping the future. And the best they had was, “it *seemed*.”

Often, in dealing with complex issues, the best we can do is say, “it *seems*.” The issue in Jerusalem referenced in Acts 15 was such a difficult, complex issue—a clash of values—a difficult conversation involving 1,500 years of tradition. They were without the having that conversation without benefit of the New Testament and without decades of experience with church matters.

Theirs was an attempt to balance what they understood to be truth with what they had experienced as grace. They could not, as fallible human beings, honestly declare they had arrived at the one, definitive, end-all-discussion, Christian answer. But they could, in all honesty, say, “This is the best we can do. It seems to us that this is the right thing. This is our best attempt at balancing grace and truth.”

“Our best” is all we can claim in complex discussions like the one considering women’s roles in church. I like the way Stackhouse expressed it:

“Our task as theologians—and, indeed, the task of any responsible Christian—is to do the best we can to understand the Word of God in its multifarious complexity, even though that will sometimes result in an interpretation that does not fit every piece of the puzzle together without strain, leaving no pieces on the table, and certainly not pocketing the inconvenient ones, hoping no one will notice!... Moreover, while we opt for this or that interpretation among the alternatives, we can

recognize that our interpretation might not interpret every single verse and answer every single question better than every one of those alternatives do. Nonetheless, our responsibility is to select among the alternatives the interpretation we believe does the *best* job of explaining all of Scripture and answering all of the attendant questions...that means to choose the best of what interpretations we have available, while admitting that our view is not perfect in every way. Thus I found the arguments of the egalitarians far more convincing than those of their counterparts.”<sup>xxi</sup>

## In light of the above

*In light of the above biblical evidence, here are my answers to four questions...*

### **1. Should women teach co-ed Sunday School classes?**

Not many people are asking this question anymore, but just in case...

As we have noted, the Bible explicitly states that Priscilla taught Apollos. Perhaps the reason Paul told women not to teach in 1 Timothy 2:12 had something to do with cultural taboos or other issues that we don't understand.

In our context I see no reason why women should not teach men in a Sunday School class or any other Bible study.

### **2. Should First Baptist Church have women deacons?<sup>xxii</sup>**

Perhaps the real questions are: “Is there biblical justification for women deacons?” Or, put another way, “Does the Bible prohibit women deacons?”

Let's consider these matters from the Bible:

**(a) Phoebe was, almost certainly, a female deacon.** Again, Romans 16:1 reads, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.”

It has been suggested by some that there might have been two separate offices in the early church, male deacons and female deacons. But there is *no* evidence of that. It is more likely that Phoebe was, simply put, a “deacon.”

Early church history indicates that there were female deacons (not a separate group from the men). Look at what Gleason Archer (an intensely conservative scholar) wrote about the reference to Phoebe in Romans 16:1:

*The ecclesiastical term for deaconess (diakonissa) never occurs in the New Testament, and so this single reference to diakonor in the feminine is unique in the Greek Scripture. This would indicate that as far as the apostolic church (the church in the generation following Jesus) was concerned, a woman deacon was very exceptional, even though allowable.* <sup>xxiii</sup>

According to Archer, then, Phoebe was a deacon in the same sense that males were deacons even though she was an apparent exception to the rule.

**(b) In fact, in 1 Timothy 3:11 it actually might be that women deacons are spoken of explicitly.** The NIV reads like this: “In the same way, their (deacons’) wives....” But, that verse *literally* reads, “In the same way, *the women*....” So, one can legitimately read this verse in such a way that it speaks directly about women deacons. That is the way such conservative scholars as Gene Getz and J. I Packer, heroes of conservative students of the Bible, understand that verse. Again, we hear from Packer:

*The only natural way to understand verse 11 is in terms of women deacons. Since the deacon’s role, according to the New Testament, is to lead the church in practical care for the needy, I see every appropriateness and no*

*inappropriateness whatever in asking women to take charge of that particular sphere in the church's service.* <sup>xxiv</sup>

**(c) The fact that deacons are spoken of using male language in the New Testament (i.e. 1 Timothy 3:8) does not exclude women from that office.** It could simply reflect a generic use of the male form of the word. We do that today, as an example, when we speak of “firemen.” Everyone understands that a reference to firefighters as “firemen” does not exclude women from that job.

The role of gender in the election of deacons should be a decision made by local churches, and members of churches who differ on the issue should not find fault with each other. And members of First Baptist Church should feel confident that there is biblical justification for our practice of ordaining women deacons.

### **3. Does the affirmation of women in ministry not put us on a slippery slope?**

Some have dug in their heels to resist women in ministry out of an understandable, and admirable, concern for what they see as a growing disregard for biblical authority. Southern Baptists, for example, often look at the affirmation of women in ministry as the gateway to a slippery slope toward liberalism.

Frankly, I appreciate that hesitancy. Concerns for slippery slopes are well-founded.

I simply do not see the allowance of women in leadership as a dangerous move toward liberalism.

## 4. What should we think of churches with women pastors?

Both you and your neighbor are doing yard work, and you take a break to chat. Your neighbor says, “Pastor Mary is coming to dinner tonight.” You respond, “Don’t you mean ‘Pastor Gary?’” “No,” says your neighbor, “It’s Pastor Mary. She’s the best pastor we’ve had since I’ve been at this church.”

What should you do? Run in the house, close the blinds and lock the doors before Pastor Mary arrives? Warn your neighbor of his heresy? Put your house up for sale and look for a neighborhood in which people are more biblically sound?

For a long time I believed that, although this is a complicated issue, the Bible does not allow for women in the pastorate. My position was based on two things: my understanding of the biblical teaching on pastoral authority (found in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14) and my conservative support of Southern Baptist tradition.

However, in the introduction of this booklet I recounted my attempt, a few years ago, to look at this issue objectively. And **I have come to believe that the Bible neither explicitly forbids nor openly endorses women pastors.** Many conservative scholars acknowledge that **“the New Testament is not uniform on such matters as women’s ministries in the church.”**<sup>xxv</sup> That has been my conclusion.

I believe the preponderance of evidence is affirming of women in ministry, including the pastorate. Yet, I cannot declare, with confidence, anything more than *it seems to me* that God smiles on women whom He has called to ministerial roles.

Furthermore, I believe Frame and Tharpe are right:

*Given the sheer number of respected evangelical scholars who regard women as being equally responsible for leadership in the church and home, we urge opponents of this view to consider whether their position owes more to tradition and habit than to biblical truth.*<sup>xxvi</sup>

One of the most striking observations I have come across is the following, by Stanley Grenz. (Note that Grenz uses “elders” and “bishops” in the same way that Baptists would use the word “pastors”):

*The New Testament nowhere directly prohibits the appointment of women to this office (elders or bishops). Consequently, persons who would bar women from the eldership on biblical grounds must develop their case from inferences.* <sup>xxvii</sup>

Grenz, I think, is right. Nowhere does the Bible explicitly demand that women not be pastors. Certainly, people can make inferences based on some of the texts we have considered in this booklet. My question is this: In light of the questions surrounding these “proof texts,” should we conclude that women absolutely cannot be pastors? I don’t think so. And I disagree with Baptist statements that censure, or even expel, congregations who choose women to be pastors. <sup>xxviii</sup>

## Conclusion

It seems to me that Galatians 3:28 does provide a foundational truth that defends and affirms women in ministry: In Christ there is no male or female.

Of course any church must proceed carefully on this point. One of the basic New Testament principles is: “Whatever hinders the movement of the gospel, causes confusion rather than growth, offends rather than encourages or strengthens, builds up the self at the expense of others—all this is contrary to God’s intention.” <sup>xxix</sup> This biblical principle implores us, in the matter of women in ministry, as in other matters, to act and think prudently and humbly.

I know that people within our church will disagree on the ordination of, and the appropriateness of, women as pastors. So

remember, two Christians can agree on the authority and truthfulness of Scripture and disagree on the role of women in the church. The role of women in the church is a matter of *interpretation*, not a litmus test for one's view of Scripture.

In conclusion, what should we think of our neighbor's church that has a woman pastor? Perhaps we should ask whether, in making their decisions, 1) they truly considered biblical teaching; and 2) whether or not the decision helped (not hindered) the movement of the gospel. If the answer to both questions is "yes," then I believe looking for a new neighborhood would be a terrible over-reaction.

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Suggested Reading:

*How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership*, Alan F. Johnson, editor (Zondervan, 2010)

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<sup>i</sup> “Complementarians (those who believe in different, complementary roles for women and men) argue that Galatians 3:28 states that race, status and gender do not provide any barriers to salvation, but that doesn’t silence other biblical passages that teach differences in responsibilities based on these distinctions...For egalitarians (those who believe in equal roles and status of men and women in the church), Galatians 3:28 speaks of an equality that goes beyond equal access to salvation, claiming that the passage has major social implications such as the removal of gender distinctions for roles within church and family life. So, for the egalitarian, equality in *being* must entail equality in *function*.” (Lionel Windsor, [http://www.lionelwindsor.net/bibleresources/bible/new/Philp\\_Gal3'28\\_History\\_of\\_Interpretation.pdf](http://www.lionelwindsor.net/bibleresources/bible/new/Philp_Gal3'28_History_of_Interpretation.pdf))

<sup>ii</sup> *Commentary on Galatians*, 190.

<sup>iii</sup> “Given the almost universal sexism of first-century settings, the preaching and ruling of women might then have been scandalous and detrimental to the preaching of the gospel. Today the situation is precisely reversed.” (Cornelius Plantiga, Jr., *Why I Changed My Mind*, 194)

<sup>iv</sup> The definitions of “prophet,” “prophets” and “prophecy” are critical to the discussion here. The definitions and descriptions below should be helpful:

*The major function of prophecy in early Christianity was to mediate divine authority to provide direction and the experience of the divine presence in the lives and activities of Christian congregations and their members...those who regularly exercised prophetic gifts in congregational settings were called “prophets” (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:29-31). Since the Greek term means “spokesperson,” the main function of the Christian prophet was a “forthteller” rather than a “foreteller,” i.e. a prophet was more occupied with mediating the word of God in concrete situations (1 Cor. 14:24-25) than with predicting the future course of events (Acts 11:28), though both functions were part of the task. (Mercer Dictionary of the Bible, pp. 714-715)*

*Prophetism may legitimately be defined as that understanding of history which accepts meaning only in terms of divine concern, divine purpose, divine participation. Indeed, by this definition, the vast bulk of biblical record is produced by prophets or at least reflects an unmistakably prophetic understanding of history...The gift of prophecy was not a possession of all Christians, but a particular spiritual endowment (“charism”) of a select number, whether men or women...By “prophecy,” Paul understands intelligible preaching that builds up the church in faith (cf. Romans 12:6), explains mysteries, and imparts knowledge (“gnosis”; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:2). In 1 Peter 1:10, the prophet’s concern is the searching of the Scriptures for the testimonia of Christ. (The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible, pp. 896, 919)*

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*In the context of the church meeting (1 Corinthians 14:26ff.) the ministry of the prophet is spoken of as revelation (verse 30)...It is some perception of the truth of God intelligibly made to the assembly. (The New Bible Dictionary, 1045).*

According to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (p. 920), the term "prophetess" can refer to "a female interpreter speaking for the deity" or "the wife of a prophet," so it will be helpful as we look at the women called "prophetesses" to try and see (when possible) how the term applies.

<sup>v</sup> "Those who favor the view that Junia was not a female apostle do so because of their prior assumption that women could not be apostles, not because there is any evidence in the text." In *10 Lies the Church Tells Women*, J. Lee Grady, p. 41.

<sup>vi</sup> Kevin Conner, *The Ministry of Women*, 265-266, 307, 308: "Junia was a common Latin female name in the Roman Empire... There is absolutely no evidence that ever was a masculine name 'Junias' in the Roman Empire, according to Dr. Peter Lampe, Professor of New Testament, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, VA: 'Without exception, the Church Fathers in late antiquity identified Andronicus' partner in Romans 16:7 as a woman, as did miniscule 33 in the 9<sup>th</sup> century which records *iounia* with an acute accent. Only later medieval copyists of Romans 16:7 could not imagine a woman being an apostle and wrote the masculine name, 'Junias.' (Same with Chrysostom, died 407 AD, who had a negative view of women but recognized Junia as a woman)... The weight of opinion from those nearest to the apostolic period is that Junia was a woman, given the feminine name... Andronicus and Junius may be seen as a married couple, not unlike Priscilla and Aquila... The strongest case for understanding (Junia) to be a woman is found in the comments on Romans 16:7 by the earliest Church Fathers... The masculine form of the name is not to be found anywhere in the literature of the Greco-Roman period. Junia, on the other hand, was a quite common name, used several hundreds of times in records from that period."

<sup>vii</sup> In *Women, Authority & the Bible*, Alvera Mickelson, ed., p. 298.

<sup>viii</sup> James Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 63

<sup>ix</sup> Stanley N. Gundry, *How I Changed My Mind*, 103

<sup>x</sup> "...Pliny, writing to the Roman Emperor Trajan (AD 100), said the two ministers of the church in his city were young women. Justin Martyr, who lived until about AD 150, says in his dialogue with Trypho, the Jew, 'that both men and women were seen among them who had the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit of God, according as the prophet Joel had foretold.'... Tertullian, one of the earliest of the Latin fathers, notes that women appear in every early reference to ecclesiastical orders... In the catacombs are found representation of women clergy, and they are shown presiding over the Lord's Supper... It is worth

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noting that it was in the Council of Laodicea that the role of women in ministry and leadership was eliminated. (Kevin Conner, *Ministry of Women: Gender and Authority in the Church*, 360, 363)

<sup>xi</sup> There is a difference between a “plain reading of the text” and “reading the text in isolation.” To read a text in isolation is to ignore the related texts which inform and shape our understanding of the text in question. The “plain reading” of a text is simply the self-evident meaning—an interpretation that does not require a series of qualifications and maneuverings, conjecture and spin.

Frankly, the difference between a plain reading and the reading of a text in isolation is the difference between exegesis (finding the meaning in the text) and eisegesis (reading meaning into the text).

<sup>xii</sup> “In ancient Greece and in Judaism women did not teach adult males, only children. Some Greek and Latin authors described how ‘decent’ women should dress, appear, and behave. Social opinions about such matters were changing, and these varied from area to area in the empire. It seemed natural for Paul to be cautious and not allow women to assume practices or roles, such as public speaking and dominance, that might bring their morals into question. The context in 1 Timothy 2:9-11 is a prime example of this. That is clear also in 1 Corinthians 11:1-10, which relates to ideas of shame and honor in Corinthian society.” (Olive Liefeld, *How I Changed My Mind*, 135)

<sup>xiii</sup> The world of the early church was a patriarchal world. “Considerable unrest over these strictures characterizes the world in which the New Testament was written. The education of women, for instance, inevitably provoked conflict over their public and private roles. It is understandable that the New Testament reflects both a tension and an accommodation with these perspectives as it sought to articulate the gospel story of Jesus the Christ and chronicle Christianity’s subsequent missionary activity in the Mediterranean world. In this matrix, the church made decisions about the role of women within the Christian community which still influence contemporary thinking and practice.” (*Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*, 966)

<sup>xiv</sup> *How I Changed My Mind*, 203.

<sup>xv</sup> When Paul wrote his epistles, Christian women were being liberated from the bondage of Jewish tradition and law, and the only example they had in the Ephesian culture was that of the pagan priestesses who controlled everything in the temple of Diana in a wild, unrestrained manner. The “subjection” Paul speaks of here does not mean submission to the men but submission in the church. (Kevin Conner, 188)

<sup>xvi</sup> Kevin Conner, 203, 197

<sup>xvii</sup> It is hard to know what to do with 1 Timothy 2:13-14. (For Adam was formed

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first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.) I simply don't understand Paul's point, unless he is attempting to correct the prominent Gnostic belief in Ephesus.

“In the most prevalent gnostic version of the story, Eve was the ‘illuminator’ of mankind because she was the first to receive ‘true knowledge’ from the serpent, whom Gnostics saw as the ‘savior’ and revealer of truth. Gnostics believed that Eve taught this new revelation to Adam, and being the mother of all, was the progenitor of the human race. Adam, they said, was Eve’s son rather than her husband...What Paul is saying is, ‘this is not what Scripture tells us...And if a woman is to teach, she must not teach that woman is the author of man—because scripture teaches that Adam was formed first, and then Eve.’” (Conner, 204, 206, 207)

<sup>xviii</sup> Stanley N. Gundry writes convincingly on this point, and says, “The full realization of the divine ideal awaits the end of history when redemptive history is consummated. In the church of the New Testament era, there were still plenty of accommodations to the realities of the fallen patriarchal order—the Twelve were all men; and however one understands the polity of the New Testament church, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the elders, or pastors, or bishops were likely all men. But if we keep our eye on the goal toward which redemptive history is moving, the apparent limitations on women evidenced in the New Testament are best understood as temporary and ad hoc. In other words, when the big picture of redemptive history is kept in mind, the New Testament is seen as a huge leap forward toward full restoration of what was lost or distorted in the fall. When I came to understand Scripture in this manner, the problem passages that had troubled me and that are so often used by hierarchicalists to justify the submission of women are understood as ad hoc accommodations to the fallen patriarchal structure.” (*How I Changed My Mind*, 103)

<sup>xix</sup> “At first glance, however, one might conclude that since the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23), Paul must be talking about ruling and governing. Surely Christ is Lord, Master, and Ruler of the church. But Paul cannot possibly mean that the husband is the head of the wife in exactly the same way that Christ is head of the church. Think of the differences. Christ is true God, the one, unique, divine healer and Savior. Christ died for the sins of the whole world. Every Christian worships Jesus Christ. None of that is true in the case of the husband, who Paul says is head of the wife. In short, there are many, many ways that the headship of Christ over the church is different from the headship of the husband. Therefore, we dare not assume that ruling and governing are part of the meaning of the husband as head unless the text explicitly says that.” (Ronald J. Sider, *How I Changed My Mind*, 230).

<sup>xx</sup> Roles in the home are not the topic here. For what it's worth, however, Kevin

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Conner is one who understands the New Testament to say that the husband has responsibility for spiritual leadership in the home, but allows for women ministers.

<sup>xxi</sup> John G. Stackhouse, *How I Changed My Mind*, 237

<sup>xxii</sup> For what it's worth, there is no consensus about the role and title of "Deacon." In some denominations that title refers to a vocational minister, while in others it is the role of a layperson. There is no widespread agreement on what that title meant in the New Testament except that the word means "servant." Furthermore, the idea of "ordination" as we practice it does not appear in the New Testament, so we are going off church tradition and the best 1) interpretation of the Scripture we can engage in, and 2) the best common sense we can muster.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 414.

<sup>xxiv</sup> *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Interpretation*, p. 115; See also *Leaders on Leadership*, George Barna, ed., p. 103; and Katherine M. Haubert, *Women as Leaders*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>xxv</sup> Fee & Stuart, *How To Read The Bible For All It's Worth*, 72.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Randall L. Frame and Alan Tharpe, *How Right Is the Right?*, 126.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Women in the Church*, p. 90; See also p. 97.

<sup>xxviii</sup> FBC Huntsville endorses the 1963 version of the Baptist Faith & Message. The 2000 version of the Baptist Faith & Message includes this about wives:

*The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.*

And the 2,000 Baptist Faith & Message says the following about women in ministry

*While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.*

The 1963 Baptist Faith & Message does not include restrictions on women's roles in church or describe women's role in the home.

<sup>xxix</sup> Manfred T Brauch, *Hard Sayings of Paul*, 171-172.