

There are typically three types of people who have issues with the fact that I am a woman who preaches or teaches the word of God. The first group is those who are trying to find or create some wiggle room in the authority of Scripture because they don't want to submit to it. Usually these are people who have taught or argued in favor of some error and when they are pointed to Scripture that clearly opposes their view they resort to their argument that Scripture is open to private or individual interpretation and in some cases is simply outdated. When I disagree and state that Scripture is not ambiguous but actually says what it means and means what it says, they then proceed to tell me if that were the case then I would not be teaching the word. Their erroneous idea is that the Bible presents a patriarchal and even misogynistic view that is outdated and if I see that in those instances I don't have to obey the Scripture then I should concede that they can recognize other "outdated" portions of the word of God that also need not be obeyed. However, that is simply not what the Scriptures actually teach.

The second group is those who have a religious spirit and honestly ARE misogynists at heart! These are men who have a low view of women and enjoy justifying their ungodly attitude towards women with twisted Scripture. They spout off venomous claims about the inherent flaws in the female gender and hurl arrogant allegations at women who disagree with their stupid assessments. They like to label any woman who dares to think for herself a "Jezebel." They honestly believe women need to be controlled and managed by men because if left to think for ourselves we would just be deceived like poor (evil) Eve and probably end up in sin, error and eventually hell. God forbid that women should use their brains, reason, or believe that they are just as capable of understanding the Scripture as men! Oh no. That is just all kinds of scary to men who feel threatened by gifted women! The gifts of the Spirit come wrapped in little blue and pink boxes, don't you know? And the pink ones are apparently all **silent!** (If you are offended by my use of sarcasm maybe you belong in this group)

Then there is a third group. These are those who read their bibles and cannot see how certain verses can be understood any other way. They have been taught that the bible forbids women from teaching or holding any positions of leadership and they honestly believe this is the only possible and truthful understanding of Scripture. While I cannot do much for those in the first two groups, I write this note for the third group. Those who genuinely want to obey the truth of the word of God! Those in this group typically do not believe it is a matter of ability but

obedience. They do not harbor any hostility towards women and don't believe they are any more wicked, evil, or less capable than their male counterparts but simply believe that God has set up a certain structure of leadership that they aim to follow. I would like to examine the Scriptures that have led many honest hearts to this conclusion.

The two Scriptures that are brought up the most, which have sincere believers convinced that women are restricted from leadership roles, are **1 Corinthians 14:34** and **1 Timothy 2:10-15**. I will quote them from the NKJV.

1 Corinthians 14:34 (New King James Version)

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.

1 Timothy 2:10-15 (New King James Version)

10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. 11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

What these verses appear to be saying:

1. Women are to keep silent in the churches.
2. Women cannot teach men, they are not to have authority over a man but to be in silence. 3. Women are more prone to deception.
4. Women will be saved by childbearing.

I will also cover **1 Timothy 3:1-13**, where Paul talks about the qualification for an overseer (bishop/elder) and deacon.

Let's take a look at what is being said in the context of these verses and look at the whole counsel of God concerning this subject.

Are women to keep silent in the church?

In 1 Corinthians, was Paul establishing a law that women were to keep silent in the churches and not be permitted to speak? If you read the verse in context, you see that Paul was addressing the conduct of the church and order in a church setting. He talked about the misuse of tongues (vs. 26- 28), and prophecy being in order.

If Paul was instructing women to keep silent in the church at all times, then why did he just give instructions for how they are to pray and prophesy a few chapters earlier in 1 Corinthians 11:5? There is an apparent contradiction in Scripture! Is Paul saying that women are to be "silent" in the church after he just got through saying they can pray and prophesy? That is what some would have you believe. I will explain why I disagree.

So, what *is* Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 14? 1 Corinthians 14:30-40 (NKJV)

30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. 32 And the

spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? 37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Some would have you believe that in verses 34-35 Paul is making a declarative statement that is inspired and to should shape our understanding of the role of women in the Church. However, there are several problems with interpreting this verse that way.

First of all, Paul's reference to the "law" in verse 34 makes no sense if we insist on interpreting it to mean the "law of God." The Law of God even under the Old Covenant does not forbid women to speak in the synagogue. There is no Old Testament law that states it is "shameful" for a woman to speak! So, what "law" is this referring to? Every other time Paul makes reference to the Old Covenant he quotes the text he is speaking of. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is **not** a quote from the Old Testament. If he is saying that God gave such a commandment why doesn't he support that statement with a reference to where God gave that commandment, like he does every other time?

Secondly, why would Paul suddenly attempt to bring believers back under the Law of Moses when he is adamantly clear everywhere else in his writings that **the New Testament believer is**

no longer under the law? (See Romans 6:14; Romans 7:4; Galatians 5:18; Romans 7:6; Galatians 3:24-25; 2 Corinthians 3:11; 2 Corinthians 3:13, etc.) That simply makes no sense! Interpreting these verses that way creates a **contradiction** in the Word of God when one really does not exist!

There is clearly the need to investigate this further rather than accept the surface reading of the text as it is *translated* here. The fact of the matter is while the word of God was originally written without error, it was not written in English and translations are not perfect, inspired or infallible. Sometimes we have to do a little more studying to find what the original meaning and intent of a verse was. God has called us to be good Bereans (Acts 17:11) and search the Scriptures for understanding and truth, and we are to study to show ourselves approved rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Scripture interprets Scripture, when we need clarity and understanding we have to take the whole counsel of Scripture into account. Paul is clear earlier in the letter to the Corinthians that women can pray and prophesy publically in the assembly. This is consistent with the rest of the word of God and yet contrary to verses 34-35.

Acts 2:17-18 (New King James Version)

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

The word “prophesy” means to foretell, or forth tell. Women were clearly delivering a message, speaking of things to come in the Kingdom of God and I believe sharing and revealing the Word of God as it pertains to what God is doing and saying now.

Galatians 3:28 (New King James Version)

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Some have argued that women are permitted to preach and prophesy but not in a “church” setting. What is a church setting? We are the church, and were two or more are gathered in His name, He is there in the midst. (Matt. 18:20) In the New Testament the church often met in homes, and even down by the river :o) ... (Acts 16:11-15).

Examples of God Using Women in Old and New Testaments

We see in Judges 4:4-5, that Deborah was both a prophetess and a judge in Israel. She was married and she was the Judge over Israel, not her husband.

God chose Deborah to shepherd His people (1 Chronicles 17:6, Acts 13:20), when He could have very well chosen a man if he had the women issues some think He has.

Another OT example would be Huldah – a prophetess (2 Kings 22) She lived in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem (where the school of the prophets was located) When King Josiah (whose story is powerful by the way) needed someone to inquire of the Lord, the priest went to Huldah, although there were several other prophets of God available at the time.

As a side note, one powerful portion of Scripture is the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, in Numbers 17. Although, it was not traditionally the custom to give daughters an inheritance the daughters of Zelophehad petitioned Moses for their inheritance and the Lord instructed Moses

to give it to them. We are joint heirs with Christ, and He is to receive the nations as His inheritance (Psalm 2:8). I believe that this is a picture of the body of Christ, and if we do not give the daughters their inheritance there will be land loss. It takes the whole body to reach the lost, and disciple the saved!

We also have some NT examples of God using women. (By the way we will get to 1 Tim., promise) I have mentioned Acts 2:17-18, and I'd like to talk about that some more. The word for "prophesy" is propheteuo, from Greek 4396 (prophetes); to foretell events, divine, speak under inspiration, exercise the prophetic office: - prophesy.

Philip had four daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:8)

If Paul was not making a declarative statement forbidding women from speaking in the Church how should we interpret 1 Corinthians 14:34-35?

There are two viable opinions. Either these verses are an interpolation, meaning the text was later added by scribes, or Paul is quoting from another source so that he can respond to the quote. There is evidence from the manuscripts that verses 34-35 were not considered to be equal with the rest of the text. Many scholars believe that they were originally included in the margin, as a quote that Paul was responding to. This would explain both the scribal notations in the manuscripts as well as the differences between manuscripts regarding the order of the text. Some place verses 34-35 after verse 33 and others place it them after verse 40.

I believe that Paul was not quoting the Law of God but the oral 'law' of the Talmud, which was not inspired Scripture, but was hostile towards women. He quoted it to rebuke it. The problem is that quotations are not consistently used in translations. The Talmud or "oral law" stated that it was "a shame for a woman to let her voice be heard among men," "a woman should not read the Torah",

and “rather have the roll of the law burned than to have it taught to women,” “the testimony of one hundred women is not equal to that of one man.” Paul said that before his conversion he was zealous for the traditions of his fathers (Galatians 1:14) but after coming to the knowledge of Christ he counted it all as dung (Philippians 3:8), and it was these same “traditions” that Jesus said caused the word of God to be of no effect (Mark 7:13). The Jewish culture at the time did not have a very favorable view of women. However, God does not and did not share their issues!

Jesus, contrary to Jewish traditions of His day, taught women! Mary sat at His feet (Luke 10:39) which was the position of a student/disciple, just as Paul said he sat at the feet of Gamaliel in Acts 23:3. Contrary to the Jewish tradition that did not honor the testimony of a woman, Jesus sent a woman to be the first person to testify of his resurrection (Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-11, Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:1-18). The word apostle means “sent one.” She is therefore called the “Apostles to the apostles” since the risen Jesus told her to ‘go and tell’, apostellein in Greek. Both Jesus and Paul were counter cultural and liberated women! I believe Paul was rebuking the oral “law” of the Jews. We will talk more about women who labored with Paul in ministry later.

Here is a series of manuscript pictures of 1 Corinthians 14:

First is the Codex Fuldensis, one of the earliest Latin manuscripts of the New Testament, which shows a notation at the bottom of the page that omits verses 34-35 showing that verse 36 should follow verse 33.

Next is the Minuscule 88, a Greek manuscript that shows 1 Corinthians 14:36 directly after verse 33. Verses 34-35 are added later after verse 40 and are separated from the main text by double slashes.

The third is the Codex Vaticanus, one of the oldest manuscripts of the entire Bible, which included a notation in the left margin of 1 Corinthians 14. There are two dots aligned beside verse 33 and a horizontal bar between verses 33 and 34. It is possible that the scribe was noting known textual issues, such as known variants between manuscripts. Throughout the text of the Vaticanus there are similar markings of textual issues. This is along with the content of the verses themselves in comparison to the rest of Scripture offers evidence that these verses are not Paul's words.

So what is Paul's response to this idea that women are to keep silent?

Let's take a look at it again line by line.

1 Corinthians 14:30-40 (NKJV)

30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

In verse 30 Paul is instructing them to take turns prophesying and to allow one another the chance to prophesy.

31 For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

In verse 31 Paul continues this instruction stating that "all" can prophesy one by one. He adds that "all may learn" so apparently things can be taught via prophecy, i.e., cause the hearer to "learn" something! (Which by the way is the definition of teach.)

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

In verse 32 Paul is saying you are able to use restraint and do things decently and in order because the spirit of the prophets are subject to, or under the control of, the prophets. Meaning you can exercise self-control (which is one of the fruits of the Spirit by the way) even while prophesying.

33 For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

In verse 33 Paul says this is so because or “for” God is not the author of confusion! It is interesting that the verses directly following this verse have mistranslated and misinterpreted to cause such confusion! That was clearly not God’s intent.

34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

Then we get to verses 34-35, not only are they contrary to the other places in Scripture that clearly state women are allowed to prophesy, but they are contrary to the context of all Paul is saying. Paul is saying “let everyone have a chance to prophesy” in essence “take turns” and do it orderly because God is not the author of confusion! He is not saying only some are allowed to speak. He is actually saying the opposite. Then we read that women should keep silent, which again is not anywhere in the Law of God. Nowhere in the Law of God is it stated that it is shameful for women to speak! The only “law” that states this is the oral “law” of the Talmud, which is not the word of God! These two verses are quotes from the Talmud that Paul is responding to. Since apparently some religious people were trying to impose this ungodly man made rule on women! **And what is Paul’s response?**

36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?

He is saying in essence is “what law?” Is this some “law” of God that came only to you, because I don’t know of any such law? Also has God only spoken to men? We see in the word of God that is not the case. There is no “law” from God that states women must be silent and cannot

speak or prophesy and the word of God has not only come through men but women of God have also been used by God to speak a prophetic word from the Lord. Paul is rebuking this man made “law” not attempting to enforce it!

37 If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. 38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

So, Paul says if anyone thinks they are a prophet or spiritual then let them acknowledge that what Paul wrote regarding allowing everyone to prophesy decently and in order are the commandments of the Lord. In other words, “your man made rule is not from God, but what I have just said is inspired and the commandment of God.” Anyone refusing to acknowledge Paul’s correction was/is “ignorant.” Paul says “let him be ignorant” because he realized that some people are stubborn and religious and will simply not submit to the truth of God’s word. Some manuscripts read “if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”

39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. 40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Paul ends with “therefore, brethren.” “Brethren” is not a gender exclusive word, but is a word Paul often used to address the body of Christ as a whole. This is why some translations render it “therefore, my brothers and sisters.” So, Paul concludes his instruction by again including sisters in Christ when we says “desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.” In context throughout this text Paul is speaking against the “forbidding” or restriction of women, or anyone who desires to operate in spiritual gifts! In context prophecy is being discussed and God did not suddenly change His mind about whether or not it was permissible for women to prophesy! His admonishment is that we “let **all** things be done decently and in order.” Not that we muzzle women in church!

Does God forbid women to teach men?

Let's look at 1 Timothy again.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 (New King James Version)

11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

This letter was written to Timothy, Paul's spiritual son, who was an elder at the church of Ephesus. He says "let woman learn in silence with all submission." The word silence here is *hesuchia*; feminine of Greek 2272 (*hesuchios*); stillness, i.e. desistance from bustle or language: - quiet, tranquil, peaceful. This same word is translated "peaceable," in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, when Paul said men should live "quiet" (Greek: *ēremōn*) and "peaceable" (Greek: *hēsychion* which is simply the masculine form of the same Greek word, Strong's #G2272) lives. Just as we might say we live in a "quiet" neighborhood. The word does not actually mean "silence" but is speaking of the absence of disturbances. It is interesting that translators told men to live "peaceably," but translated the same word to tell women to be silent. *Hesuchois* denotes "keeping one's seat". Paul was saying not to get upset, out of your seat or get stirred up about disagreements but learn in peace and quietness. When we understand who Paul was speaking to and what he was addressing the reason for his instruction becomes even clearer.

1 Timothy says "do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, but to be in silence."

Before I get into the context and what Paul was **actually** saying I'd like to point out that God has used women to teach or "instruct" even men in the Bible. Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside to more accurately explain the truth to him in Act 18:24-26. Paul calls Pricilla and Aquila his "fellow workers" (Romans 16:3-5) in Christ, who risked their lives for his. This is the same term he used to describe Timothy (Romans 16:21), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Demas and Luke (Philemon 1:24), Pricilla (Romans 16:3), and Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:3), **the last three being women**. These "fellow workers" or "co-laborers" were those who did the work of the ministry alongside Paul. Pricilla and Aquila are mentioned several times in Scripture, and some scholars believe it was Pricilla who wrote the book of Hebrews.

And as I pointed out earlier Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:31 that **all** may prophesy so that all may **learn!** So, we have seen that **God uses prophecy as a means to cause the hearer to learn** (which is what it means to "teach") and **God uses women** and men alike to **prophesy**. So if God was really forbidding women to teach men anything they He would not allow them to prophesy. Again, the interpretation that restricts and forbids women causes clear contradictions in Scripture which are not there when these verses are rightly divided and understood!

Some background regarding the church in Ephesus that Paul is speaking to in 1st Timothy.

Meet Artemis/Diana of Ephesus:

The ancient city of Ephesus was the largest city in Asia Minor and was known for its worship of the goddess Artemis (also called Diana). Their temple dedicated to her was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The temple attracted thousands of visitors a year.

In Acts 19 we read the account of Paul's visit to the city of Ephesus. Paul spent two years reasoning daily with the people of Ephesus! The cult worship of Diana was deeply entrenched in the city and Paul's preaching posed a financial threat to those who benefited from the worship of Diana. Demetrius, a silversmith, who made his living selling shrines of Diana gathered other

craftsmen and incited a riot. The people of the city shouted “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” for two hours! (**Acts 19:21-41**)

Timothy was later urged by Paul to remain in Ephesus and minister to the believers there (**1 Timothy 1:3**), that he would “charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor **give heed to fables and endless genealogies**, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.” In order to understand the instructions Paul sends Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, we have to understand the influence of this cult of Diana, and the doctrines her followers taught. The mixture of Gnosticism and goddess worship had led to the popularity of the following beliefs.

The Doctrines of Artemis/Diana Worship:

- Diana was a goddess of both war and childbirth. They believed that she protected women in childbirth. However, she was not exactly a benevolent entity but violent and feared believed to have the power to give both life and death.
- She was a fertility goddess who was believed to be capable of reproducing without a male. Her worship promoted a matriarchal belief system that was female dominated and traced the genealogies of matriarchs, which is why Paul mentioned those who “give heed to fables and endless genealogies.”
- Women were believed to be superior to men.
- They believed that in Creation Eve was the source of Adam’s life.
- They denied that Eve sinned in the garden.

These were the challenges that Timothy continued to face when Paul penned this letter to him to encourage Timothy to continue preaching against this pagan worship. It was these lies that Paul was specifically addressing in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 (New King James Version)

11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Many believe that the sentence structure in Greek in verses 11-12 are not speaking of all women but a particular woman/group of women who were teaching these female domineering heresies. "In silence [implying calm or inner tranquility] and all subjection" is not limited to women but anyone who is causing disruption and divisions among the church. Remember Paul tells the Corinthians to allow others to speak and to be silent when others are speaking.

Paul then says he did not permit a woman to teach or have "authority" over a man.

The Greek word *authentain* translated "authority" in verse 12 is only used once in Scripture. It is not the word for authority that is used elsewhere in the New Testament. So, in order to understand this word accurately we need to consider what the word meant in Greek literature.

In her book *In the Spirit We're Equal*, Susan Hyatt quotes Leland Edward Wilshire's research into the meaning of this word. She writes, "he observed that it always carried the connotations of violence and did not mean simply 'to have authority over.' In the Greek of the New Testament era, *authentain* always carried the meaning of "murder" or "murderer."

Authentein from the root words for self and arm, it literally means to take up arms, or violently enforce your self-imposed rule over another. On one extreme you have the patriarchal view of male dominated leadership and subservient women, the Ephesians were dealing with the other extreme, women who were domineering and "violent" in their behavior towards men.

Paul goes on to correct these pagan teachings, stating that contrary to the cult of Diana, Adam was formed first and Eve **was** deceived and fell into transgression. He goes on to make a statement that makes absolutely no sense when separated from the context of the errors Paul is addressing. He says, "Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with self-control." Paul is assuring women that they will be "safe during childbearing." Why does he say this? Again, because they believed they needed to worship and appease the goddess Diana in order to have safe childbirths.

A more accurate rendering of these verses might read:

1 Timothy 2:12-13

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to domineer over man [with aggressiveness and violence] but to be in quietness [implying calm] ... For Adam was created first, then Eve.”

Submit One to Another

When discussing godly servant leadership it always amazes me when people say “women are not to be domineering over men,” as if men are supposed to be domineering over women. Many like to quote 1 Timothy 2:12 in the KJV, and say that women are not to “usurp” authority over the man. They believe that the implication is the authority belongs to the “man” and women are usurping, illegally taking, that authority. The truth is the men are not to usurp authority either! Men are not inherently the possessors of “authority” because of their gender, and have no more spiritual right to domineer over women than women have to domineer over men. **The truth is men should not domineer over anyone and neither should women!** Some of this confusion is the result of a skewed perspective of what ministry truly is to begin with!

Mark 10:42-44 (NKJV)

42 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.

God has not designed for men to lord over women any more than He has designed for women to lord over men. Godly leaders are servants not people who lord over others. Paul was rebuking the women of Ephesus who sought to domineer over men. Jesus rebuked the disciples for having a similar attitude regarding their jockeying for position. Jesus said that he who desires to be greatest let him be your servant.

We are supposed to honor one another and submit one to another (1 Peter 5:5). Leaders and Elders are to serve as shepherds not lording over the flock but leading by example.

1 Peter 5:2-4 (ESV)

2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 **not domineering over those in your charge**, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

1 Peter 5:3 (NKJV)

nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

Often those who hold an egalitarian view of Biblical womanhood are accused of being “feminist.” We are not feminist. We believe that neither patriarchal (male dominance) nor matriarchal (female dominance) is godly! We are not saying women should be free to lord over or as Jesus said “exercise authority over” anyone. That is not how the Kingdom of God works, that is how the world, i.e. “the Gentiles” do it. No, we simply believe that women are free to utilize their God given gifts in service to the body of Christ in whatever capacity God has called and equipped them for.

Can Women Serve in Church Leadership Positions?

Were women deacons?

It is important to note that there are **only two** positions of Biblical leadership in the New Testament Church and they are that of deacons and elders. We know that elders served in different capacities according to their giftedness whether it was as an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher, and deacons served in helps ministries to assist the elders in the ministry functions of the church. SO, leaders in the NT were either elders or deacons (the apostles were all elders). This note does not get into all the details of church government or the structure of church leadership, I do want to write a note concerning that topic at some point, but it is important that we realize both elders and deacons were leaders in the church.

The word deacon comes from the Greek word diakonos, which is usually translated either “servant” or “minister,” except for the few times it is translated “deacon” (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8, 1 Timothy 3:12, and in some translations, Romans 16:1)

1 Timothy 3:1-13, which outlines the qualifications of spiritual leadership, was translated poorly, whether intentionally or not, the fact that Paul was speaking to both men and women is lost in translation. The discrepancy between the original language and the translations which are most common today has led to misunderstandings about the qualifications of leadership. Let’s start with verses 8-13.

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (New King James Version)

8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

In the Greek language the same word for woman is also used for wife, and the word for man is the same word used for husband.

In context, the translators had to determine whether the passage was speaking to women in general or to wives. Women: **gunē**, from the base of Greek word 1096 (ginomai); a woman; specially a wife: - wife, woman

Man: **aner**, a primary word [compare Greek 444 (anthropos)]; a man (properly as an individual male: - fellow, husband, man, sir.)

I believe Paul was actually speaking about the character of both men and women who serve as deacons (and elders which we will get to) in the church. The sentence structure and content do not justify the use of the word wives rather than women. It is the same word, and up to translators to determine if wives or women should be used. I believed translators allowed their own chauvinistic view to influence them, when determining which word (women or wives) was appropriate. The words “their” and “must” were injected by translators and are not in the original text.

I believe verse 11 should read. **“Likewise women be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things,”** referring to women who serve as deacons, then to men saying, **“let deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.”**

The word that is translated “deacon” here is the same word used in Romans 16:1, when Paul refers to Phoebe. In other instances when referring to men it is translated “minister” and “deacon” but when referring to a women translators chose “servant.” Ministers **are** servants (as we discussed above), and Phoebe was a minister and “deaconess.”

Male Pronouns?

Now let’s look at the entire passage. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 speaking of the qualification of a “bishop”/overseer (which in Scripture is synonymous for “elder”) seems to be speaking of men specifically.

1 Timothy 3:1-13 (NKVJ)

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. 2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Verse 1 says, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.”

However, when you read it in Greek it does not contain the word for “man” (*aner* which I mentioned earlier) and does not contain gender specific pronouns. The word translated “any man” is *tis*. This is the definition in the Strong’s concordance:

τις τις, tis; an enclitic indefinite pronoun; **some or any person** or object:—a (kind of), any (man, thing, thing at all), certain (thing), divers, he (every) man, one (X thing), ought, + partly, some

(man, - body, - thing, -what), (+ that no-)thing, what(-soever), × wherewith, **whom(-soever), whose(- soever).**

This word is often translated into English as “any man” but it still means “anyone.” This is not a gender exclusive term but gender inclusive or gender neutral, rather than specific. When we read other verses that are speaking of humanity in general but are translated in male pronouns we do not assume that they are speaking only to the male gender, and we should not make that assumption here either.

When Jesus says for example, “If **anyone** desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” in Matthew 16:24, “**anyone**” is the same Greek word *tis*. Even in the translations that render this verse “If any man will come after Me, ...” (such as the KJV) it is understood to be gender neutral even though translators use the words “man” and “he.” If Paul intended to be gender specific he could have used gender specific nouns and pronouns, but he didn’t.

What it actually says is this:

“This is a faithful saying: If anyone desires the position of a bishop, they desire a good work.”

The point being, the desire to serve as bishop is a good thing! Not just for males. It is a faithful saying or a trustworthy saying! So why do we insist on changing it to mean something it does not actually say or mean? Many have insisted it means “If any MALE desires” and have excluded women when the word of God has not.

If gender is such an important requirement for leadership as some claim, then why wouldn’t Paul have been clear and used gender specific terms to make it plain and remove all doubt? If it is so important to God that women do not serve in these positions then God would have insured that the qualifications for such positions were written to include the male gender and exclude the female gender. Yet, the opposite is true. It may not appear to be at first glance as you read your

English translation, but it is clearly the case in the original language. There are times when the New Testament very clearly uses gender specific language; this is not one of those times.

I am sorry if I sound redundant but I just want to be clear! As we read the requirements for Bishop and Deacon, none of them are written in gender specific language.

To further ruffle some religious feathers, I think it is interesting to note that the word that is translated “bishop” which means “overseer” here in 1 Timothy 3:1 is actually a **feminine noun**. Should we interpret that to mean a Bishop has to be a woman? Of course not, but that is the kind of faulty hermeneutics people use to silence and restrict women!

Look it up. Here is the Strong’s info:

Strong's Concordance

1984 episkopé: a visiting, an overseeing

Original Word: ἐπισκοπή, ἥς, ἡ

Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine

Transliteration: episkopé

Phonetic Spelling: (ep-is-kop-ay')

Short Definition: visitation of judgment, oversight

Definition: (a) visitation (of judgment), (b) oversight, supervision, overseership.

The Husband of One Wife

Let's keep reading,

“2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;”

As he lists these requirements, “the husband of one wife” is listed alongside other godly character requirements. This is the only time Paul speaks specifically to males, when saying that men who desire to be leaders in the Church can only be married to one woman. He repeats this same thing in verse 12. What is Paul saying? He is saying men who desire to serve in leadership cannot have more than one wife. His intent is clear. Does he say “anyone (tis) who desires to be a bishop or a deacon must be a man (male/aner)?” No, he never says that. Does he say single men are not allowed to serve in ministry since they are not the “husband of one wife?” Of course not! This “husband of one wife” requirement does not disqualify women any more than it disqualifies single men! That is NOT the point Paul was making so let's not put words in Paul's mouth, or God's for that matter! It is obviously **not** speaking to women or single men, but that does not mean it disqualifies either. Actually, Paul encourages those who want to serve in ministry to remain single if they can, because he says it is more difficult to have to manage a family and ministry (1 Cor. 7:7-9). The only people that the “husband of one wife” requirement disqualifies are men who have more than one wife! Why did Paul write that requirement specifically to men? Because only men COULD have more than one wife! Historically and culturally women were not married to more than one husband. Men on the other

hand at times and in certain cultures did have several wives. This was never God's design as Jesus affirms even when He talks about marriage. God's design is that marriage is between one man and one woman. This is what Paul was addressing with that statement, not a gender requirement! So, don't get it twisted.

**4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence
5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.**

As we continue to read, Paul returns to using gender neutral language. **Verse 4** in Greek simply reads:

“one who manages own household well, having children in submission with all reverence.”

Pronouns like “his” and “he” are added for clarity in English. However, it is just as applicable to women.

Verse 5 says:

(for if anyone does not know how to rule own house, how will take care of the church of God?);

As in verse 1, the word for “any man” is *tis*, meaning anyone, and the pronoun “his” is added by the translators but is not in the Greek texts.

The “he” is added in **Verses 6 and 7**.

“He” is not in the Greek text. It simply reads.

6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7 Moreover must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

However, when reading it in the English language it sounds awkward without pronouns so they are added. That does not justify making being of the male gender a requirement for leadership.

The fact the Phoebe was a woman and was a deacon, is evidence that Paul's "husband of one wife" requirement does not disqualify women. If it doesn't disqualify women from the role of a deacon it should not disqualify women from the role of overseer either.

Likewise Deacons, and Likewise Women

8 Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. 13 For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Verses 8-10 are still gender neutral. Some translations add male pronouns others do not, but they are not in the Greek texts. This applies to men and women.

And we get back to Verse 11 is structured like verse 8. Verse 8 says "likewise deacons" because Paul is saying deacons should have the same moral character as bishops (elders) and he reiterates the type of character that includes, ending with "being found blameless" which is

how he started the qualifications for bishops. Then he says “Likewise, **gunē**.” As I said earlier, this is the Greek word for woman, and is the same word for wife. So, Paul says all those who desire to be a bishop are required to have a godly “blameless” character, “likewise deacons” must have the same type of blameless character, then says “likewise women” must be “reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.” Yet translators determined that Paul rather than including women, was speaking of the wives of deacons. Why is Paul suddenly speaking of a deacons wife? He didn’t speak of an elder’s wife and elders have more responsibilities than deacons. Was Paul really interjecting a qualification for the wife of a deacon or is he simply including women?

The translators decided Paul must be speaking of the wives of deacons. Why? I believe they did so because they had already decided women are not allowed to be in ministry and therefore read their own bias into the text rather than just translating what it literally says. Usually, we determine that **gunē** is speaking of a wife rather than just a woman by the context (marriage is being spoken of, etc) or the fact that the woman is being referred as the **gunē** of a man. If Paul intended us to believe he was addressing the wives of deacons or elders he could have added “of deacons” or “of bishops” to refer to a wife rather than simply a female.

Here Paul simply says, “Likewise women” as he said “Likewise deacons.” In context it is clear that Paul is saying likewise women who desire to serve in these positions have the same moral requirements and must be godly women “reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.”

He repeats that deacons like bishops need to be “husband of one wife” and rule their own houses well.

More Examples

Examples of woman leading “home churches”: These were not “cell groups” like we have now, at this time congregations would often meet and be ministered to in homes. And women did minister there as well.

1 Corinthians 1:11 and Philipians 4:2 Chloe and Euodia had believers gather in their homes.

Romans 16:7 (New King James Version)

7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Junia was a woman, and Paul listed her amongst “apostles”.

So, you can't say women can't lead when they clearly lead in the New Testament Church and served in leadership capacity. Here is the deal... if there is an exception to the "rule" in the Word, there is no rule. If it is not ok for women to be deacons, then Phoebe would not have been one. If the requirement of being “the husband of one wife” did not disqualify women from the position of deacon then it doesn't disqualify women from serving as elders either!

To Whom Much is Given Much is Required! (Luke 12:48)

I believe that church or spiritual authority is according giftedness and calling (Eph. 4:11-12, 1 Cor. 12:28) not gender, and in matters of the spirit there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28).

There is so much that can be said about God's view of women, and biblical womanhood. I don't have the time to cover all of it, nor do I claim to know all there is to know about God's word concerning women. I hope this note will encourage you to keep diving into the Word for yourself.

It all boils Down to Obedience!

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard someone say, “men are called to lead and women are not,” while they quote 1 Timothy 3 with great emphasis on the male pronouns and the word man, having no clue that neither are in the Greek text.

“If a **MAN** desires the position of a bishop, **HE** desires a good work.” They say... they even drag it out a little to make sure I get it. “If a **MAAAAANNNNNN** desires the position of a bishop, **HEEEEEEE** desires a good work.” He must be the “**HUSBAND** of one wife.”

That obviously did not stop Phoebe or any of the other women God has used! I thank God that it has not stopped the women in China who lead thousands in underground house churches or the many women who have labored in the work of the ministry and even risked their lives doing so! Some even giving up their lives are martyrs for the cause of Christ.

It is easy for a man to tell a woman she is not allowed to do something because she is a woman. It is also easy for a woman to tell another woman she is not allowed to do something when they feel no calling to do that “something” themselves!

Paul said “woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” Those who do not feel a call to preach may not be able to relate to such a woe because it has not been “laid upon” them (1 Cor. 9:16)!

Jeremiah said he could no longer hold back the word of the Lord that burned in him like fire shut up in his bones (Jer. 20:9). When you meditate on His word day and night and wake up to the sound of sermons being preached in your spirit, and revelation of His word bubbling up inside of you, it’s a little hard to shake, even if you try. When you see the need for discipleship in the body of Christ, the hunger of those eager to learn, and you are burdened for their spiritual wellbeing and concerned for those who are being led astray, it’s not so easy to shake the deep desire to care for the sheep. You can relate to Paul when he says, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?” (2 Corinthians 11:29) You look out at the people as Jesus looked out at the crowd and you are moved with compassion for them because they are weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:36). You see that the harvest is ready and the laborers are few! (Matt. 9:37) Then you hear a Voice from heaven ask “Who shall I send? Who will go for Us? And you can’t help but answer, “Here am I! Send me” (Is. 6:8)!!!! NOT because you have some delusions of grandeur. Not for filthy lucre’s sake. Not because you have some lust for power or desire to be “above” anyone but because Your

God who you love is worthy and the cries of those young Monrovia boys who sold themselves into slavery for the chance to preach the gospel echo deep within your soul and you want to shout out with them, “worthy is the lamb to receive the reward of His suffering!”

People are dying and going to hell and believers are stagnant, weary, and hungry for the word and desiring a teacher and we quibble over who we think the “boss” should be, not even realizing that this authoritarian attitude towards ministry is far more offensive to God than a woman discussing Scripture! But this is not a note on servant leadership or the problems with our man made hierarchies, so I will leave it at that.

I do not care to have my name in lights, to be called by some puffed up title (Jesus said not to use titles by the way!!!! Matt. 23:6-10, just sayin’), I have no desire to lord over anyone. Instead I value every opportunity to pour out of me what God has poured into me. My greatest desire is to honor God and for my life to be poured out as a drink offering before Him (Philippians 2:7; 2 Timothy 4:6).

You may disagree with me, and that is fine. Still, when I stand before God in heaven to give and account for my life your opinions of me and women in ministry will not be what matters. “But I am a woman and they said I cannot minister or preach” is not and will not be an acceptable excuse for disobedience to the call of God! My prayer is that I will be able to say like Paul did as he stood before King Agrippa, as I stand before the highest court and the King of Kings, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision! (Acts 26:19) I pray you are able to say the same!

Love and grace! Yours in Christ, D. E.