



LEADING TOGETHER

Recapturing God's Original Plan for Men & Women

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Foreword

The leadership and ministry role of women in the church has been a journey involving both pain and joy for my wife and me over the years we have served the church. We both grew up in conservative Mennonite churches where men and women sat on different sides of the church. The only teaching role given to women was to teach the children in Sunday school. Only men were given leadership roles in the church.

We both grew up with a deep conviction and appreciation for the authority and inspiration of Scripture, which we still hold strongly to today. So, there was much struggle in our journey to understand God's call on our lives and how to understand the Scriptures in relationship to that call. In this booklet I will share what we have come to believe is a faithful and accurate interpretation of the Scripture and God's plan for men and women to lead together. My wife and I have enjoyed serving together as senior pastors for many years.

I honor my wife for choosing to gently and faithfully walk in the gifts God has given her, sometimes in the face of opposition and misunderstanding. There were times she was refused a title or position simply because she was a woman, even though she was functioning in that role in her gifts and service. She was on the elder team as my wife but could not be called an elder simply because she was a woman, even though she was helping make governmental decisions with the elder team. She was using her gifts to pastor people but could not be given the title of pastor simply because she was a woman. She chose not to demand her way or push for position or title. She just continued serving and using her gifts without any special title. Because of her example, and the pain she endured, she has made a way for the generation of women coming behind her in our church. Today there is a new freedom for women to serve and lead together with men. Today my wife is a recognized elder and pastor, and we have other women elders and pastors on our leadership teams. We still have biases to overcome that crop up at times, but we are learning and growing together.

I have come to more fully appreciate the contribution women bring to the life and ministry of the church. God has empowered and gifted them alongside men. Like men, women were created in God's image, so their feminine perspective and insight bring another aspect of God's nature and wisdom to the table. Men do not have more of God's character and nature than women. God deposited aspects of himself in both man and woman. Together we have a more complete understanding of God and his wisdom.

Women are the greatest untapped resource in the church. I believe in these last days we will see the gifts of women functioning alongside men resulting in a higher level of effectiveness and grace released upon the church. That's what God originally intended, and still does.

I understand that Christians hold to varying views on the role of women in leadership within the church. This calls for humility and grace among us. Let's not lower ourselves to name-calling –

to label each other as a heretic or chauvinist. Let's not be arrogant in thinking we somehow hold the high ground in our understanding. We all have things we can learn from each other in this discussion.

Leading Together

Interpreting the Scriptures

It is helpful to humbly admit we all approach the Scriptures with a certain bias. Much of it comes from our own history, background, and the religious indoctrination we have received. We are not always aware of our bias. But it is good to be alert to this reality as we try to understand and apply Scripture. I know my interpretation of Scripture has been impacted by how I was taught, and by what I experienced growing up. So, I need humility and tools to help me rightly interpret the Scriptures as God intended them to be understood.

Faithful and honest interpretation of the Scriptures requires every student of the Word to follow proper principles of interpretation to arrive at an accurate understanding of scripture and its application to life today. Failing to understand and follow these principles can lead to faulty interpretation and erroneous teaching. Without clear principles of interpretation, our own biases, cultural lenses, traditions, and experiences can cause us to misinterpret what God intended when the Scriptures were received by the people in that culture and time.

Biblical interpretation has to do not only with understanding and developing the skills of biblical interpretation but also the heart-posture of the interpreter. There needs to be humility and an openness to the Holy Spirit, who is the master interpreter, helping us to understand the Word and the Spirit of the Word.

As the Scriptures say, we are to handle the Word of Truth with care and reverence.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

There are many things I could say about good, sound biblical interpretation, but for the matter at hand, I will just mention the importance of **customs, culture, context, and original language**.

Customs

Understanding the customs of the people of that day helps us know if the Scripture is addressing either a local custom or a commandment for all times. Certain practices such as washing a guest's feet, greeting each other with a kiss, and wearing a veiling were all local customs and were not intended as a command for all people and cultures. The customary and cultural role of women must be considered in this discussion.

Culture

One needs to understand the difference between a basic biblical principle and the cultural applications of that principle. For instance, teaching our children about God is a biblical principle. However, the institution of Sunday School is a cultural application of that principle. Sunday School began in the late 18th century. Since then, Sunday School has become a tradition and an accepted way of teaching our children about God; Sunday school is a cultural adaptation of the principle. We could do away with Sunday School and come up with some other ways to teach our children and still be faithful to the principle. We also see various cultural expressions of other principles, such as modesty and worship. The application and expressions vary in different parts of the world, based on culture. Principles don't change but applications do, with culture and time.

Context

Discovering the original intent of the Scripture - as the original hearers would have heard it in their context - is important to properly interpret the text. Why did the author write this? What was happening? What was his concern? What was the issue that Paul, for example, was addressing? What parts are for all time and what parts were for a specific problem in the original context? How does it line up with the rest of Scripture? One cannot properly interpret and apply the text without understanding the context in which it was given.

Original Language

The New Testament, and Paul's letters, were written in the Greek language. So, understanding the Greek words Paul used helps us to understand what he was trying to communicate.

When you combine custom, culture, context, and the meaning of the text in its original language, you are in a much better position to interpret the text and know how to apply it today. This is honest, faithful, biblical interpretation. This is my goal as we tackle this subject.

I want to also reaffirm my commitment to the authority and inspiration of Scripture as we carefully interpret God's Word to us. God's Word is authoritative in all matters of life and conduct.

In the Beginning

When reading a book, it is not good to open it just anywhere and start reading. You can miss the whole plot, or at least misinterpret what it is all about. The same is true with the subject of the role of women in the church. Cherry-picking verses in Corinthians and Timothy can lead you to wrong conclusions because the story doesn't really start there. Those are side issues to the real story. Paul's writings must be read within the larger context of the whole Bible.

The story and plot begin in Genesis. The “*law of first mention*” gives us the foundation upon which to interpret the rest of the Bible on a given theme. How God introduces the roles of man and woman gives us the lens through which we are to interpret the rest of what we read about their respective roles. This is what we mean by the “law of first mention.”

What was God’s original intent for how man and woman were to function? What was their assignment? How did God envision them functioning before the fall? Is there a model for us to strive for and follow today? Is God’s original intent a guide for us today? Let’s read God’s plan and the assignment he gave to both man and woman.

Genesis 1:26-28 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Both man and woman were made in the image and likeness of God. Both men and women are image-bearers. Both equally reflect who God is. Together we see a more perfect representation than if we considered them separately.

From this we see that God’s original plan was for man and woman to work together as equal partners. He told “them” to subdue and rule over the earth. They were to share rulership and work and lead together in taking dominion over the earth. This was, and still is, God’s intent. The only thing that has changed is that sin has corrupted the relationship between man and woman, causing them to be in conflict with each other. Before sin messed up their relationship, Adam and Eve ruled together as a team. Eve was an equal part of that team. They were real partners, co-leaders.

God refers to Eve as a “suitable helper,” or partner, for Adam. (Gen. 2:20-21) This is not an inferior or subservient term or role. It is never used in a subservient way in the scriptures. Helper is the name given to the Holy Spirit and, in other places, to Almighty God. He is our helper! He is at our side! Man has twisted the scriptural idea of “helper” in regard to women to mean one who is lesser and the servant of another. This is wrong, and not biblical. God designed the perfect person to come alongside Adam to rule with him with her gifts and abilities. God’s will then and now is for men and women to serve side-by-side with an equal mandate to rule.

The problem we have is trying to interpret and define the roles of men and women through the “fall” instead of through the original blessing and mandate of God.

The fall puts man and woman in competition and conflict. The original blessing puts man and

woman in cooperation and mutual honor.

The fall causes us to try to control and rule over each other. The original blessing causes us to rule together.

The fall of Adam and Eve turned this divine relationship into a battleground. Part of the judgment on mankind is stated in Genesis 3:16.

Genesis 3:16 . . . Your desire (teshugah) will be for your husband, and he will rule (mashal) over you.

According to the Hebrew, this verse could be paraphrased “*You shall desire to control your husband, and he will try to dominate you.*”

We have seen this struggle in the home, the world, and the church. God’s divine plan and roles for men and women have been abused and misused by both sexes. God declared that the result of their willful sin, which caused the fall of all mankind, would bring pain for both of them – Adam in trying to make a living, Eve in child birth – and the unity between them would become a struggle. God is not making a command here but simply declaring what they would experience as a result of their sinful choice and the fallen nature they would now walk in. This is the judgment they have brought upon themselves. This is the fallen condition they would need to overcome.

This doesn’t mean we should just give up and stop working, stop having children, or cease working together as men and women and husbands and wives. The one area we do have some control over is choosing to honor each other instead of selfishly trying to control each other.

God’s original intent was, and still is, for men and women to rule together in the earth. Jesus came to redeem what was lost and corrupted in the fall, which some day will include a new heaven and earth free of the curse. God promised that from the seed of the woman the head of the serpent would be crushed. Jesus, born of a virgin, came to ransom and restore us back to our position with God and each other. He came to destroy the works of the devil. Through a woman, salvation came to mankind.

The real issue is not whether women can have leadership roles but how can we lead together as God created and designed us to do. Are we letting the “fall” define our roles, or are we cooperating with Jesus in redeeming our roles? The Kingdom, which is God’s rule and reign, is here now. He is bringing forth a new creation-order in us. Jesus is the second Adam to restore all things. We are a new creation. (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Women in the Old Testament

Throughout the Scriptures we see the Holy Spirit calling forth women. God's original plan for women keeps breaking through, even in the oppressive patriarchal culture of the Old Testament era.

Deborah, a married woman in the Old Testament, held two offices in Israel: one as a prophetess and one as a ruler or judge. She held the top-ranking governmental position. People came to her for direction and discernment. Under her leadership, the children of Israel were delivered from a twenty-year-long occupation by their enemy. She also worked closely with Barak, the Israeli general. (Judges 4-5)

God lists Miriam along with Moses and Aaron as the leaders who led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. In addition to leading alongside Moses, she also served as the prophetic worship leader before the congregation of people. (Micah 6:4; Exodus 15:20-21)

Huldah served in an influential role as a prophetess. The priests looked to her for counsel. Through her influence, sweeping moral and spiritual reforms resulting in revival came to the nation. (2 Kings 22:14)

Jesus and Women in the New Testament

Jesus the Creator, Savior, Liberator, and Redeemer breaks through the male-dominated cultural barriers of his day and lifts women to a place of honor beside him in ministry. Judaism was basically a man's religion, characterized by male domination and suppression. Jesus came and broke the stereotypes and confronted the cultural and religious biases of his day toward women. This angered the religious leaders because he was breaking the traditions and rules that men had set over women.

In that culture, women were not allowed to study the Scriptures nor allowed to speak to a man in public who was not her husband. Her testimony in court was considered worthless. She was little more than the property of man, to serve him. Jesus ignored all this and invited women to follow him and talk to him. They were part of the larger group of disciples that followed Jesus around. This was unheard of in those days since teachers did not have women disciples following them. But Jesus welcomed and embraced them to sit and learn from him and also help him in his ministry. Many women supported him financially as well. (Luke 8:1-3) Dorcas is mentioned as a disciple. (Acts 9:36)

Jesus was always very kind and open with women. He treated men and women as having equal value, and restored women to the dignity and worth of God's original purpose. He broke a big taboo by talking to the woman at the well, and he allowed a ceremonially unclean woman and former prostitute to touch and anoint him - and even blessed her for doing so. Even his disciples

reacted to this, but Jesus didn't care because he came to redeem and restore both men and women back to the Father. In his Kingdom, male and female were of equal value, worth, and dignity.

Women were with Jesus at key times of his life, such as his birth, crucifixion, and resurrection. Jesus asked the women to proclaim the message of his resurrection to the apostles. He also rebuked the disciples for not believing the testimony of the women concerning his resurrection. Jesus is still asking women to proclaim his message to all people. The great commission to preach the gospel is a commission to both men and women.

Jesus did away with Old Covenant circumcision, which only males could participate in, and instituted New Covenant baptism, which now recognized both genders in equal covenant with God.

Galations 3:27-28 "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

This passage is referring to our redemption, value, and worth before God. It is not referring to roles or other distinctions here. A Jew is still a Jew and a man is still a man and a woman a woman. But we are all now one in Christ. Salvation and covenant is for all equally. Jesus also coined a new term calling women "daughters of Abraham." (Luke 13:10-17). Up to this time only men had the honor of being recognized as sons of Abraham. Jesus was restoring all things and lifting women up to their rightful place.

Women in the Early Church

In the early church, women were involved in leadership. Because of Jesus' example, the early church embraced the gifts and calling of women alongside men.

Anna was a prophetess in the temple who God used at Jesus' dedication to proclaim that he is the expected Messiah. (Luke 2:36-38)

Phillip's four daughters and Phoebe are mentioned as deaconesses and prophetesses, which were public ministry roles in the church. Historian Eusebius says Phoebe oversaw two churches and traveled extensively in ministry. (Romans 16:1-2; Acts 21:9; Romans 16:1-2)

A husband and wife team, Aquila and Pricilla, are mentioned as Paul's fellow workers. They ministered as a couple in a public teaching ministry in the church. (Acts 18:18-26; Romans 16:3)

Lydia was the first European convert. She was a business-woman, and the historian Eusebius indicates that she led the Philippian church for a time. (Acts 16:14-15)

Evidently Euodia and Syntyche, the two women Paul spoke correction to in Philippians 4:2-3, had quite a bit of influence in the church as well. It appears that they served in some form of leadership in the newly-founded church at Philippi.

Local assemblies were often referred to as “houses.” The reference to someone’s house usually indicated that that person was the leader of that house church. A church met in Nympha’s house in Laodicea. (Colossians 4:15) Paul refers to Chloe’s household in I Corinthians 1:11. They were leaders of their respective house churches.

In 2 John 1, a “chosen lady” or “elect lady” is addressed as a leader of a house church. The word “lady” is from the Greek word “Kuria,” the feminine form of “Kurios,” which was a respectful title meaning “supreme in authority.” In this context it most likely referred to her as senior pastor or senior elder of the church in her home. She was charged by John to protect the church that met in her home from false teachers.

In 1 Timothy 5:2, the feminine form of the noun “presbuterous” (presbutera) is used. This is used at times to refer to age but also to an appointed official and the office of elder. If Paul simply meant an older woman, he could have used the word “presbutis,” as used in Titus 2:3. He is referring to women in the leadership role of elder in this text.

Junia is listed as outstanding among the apostles. Junia can be translated as a male or female name. Early church fathers and a lot of biblical scholars think Junia was a woman who served as an apostle in the church. (Romans 16:7)

There is clear evidence and precedence in both the Old and New Testaments that leadership roles and leadership anointing are not for males only. Jesus came and restored women to their proper role alongside men to lead together.

Equal Gifts and Anointing

There is clear evidence scripturally, historically, and experientially today that God has anointed men and women equally in the New Covenant with his Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

Acts 2:17-18 “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.”

God has removed the barrier between male and female and has restored his original blessing on women to minister and to lead alongside men with the same Holy Spirit gifting and anointing.

There are some distinctions in roles based on giftings, callings, and roles such as husband and

wife and father and mother. But we find our roles *alongside* each other where we *lead together* with the same empowerment of the Holy Spirit in a spirit of mutual honor.

Ascension Leadership Gifts to Both Men and Women

Ephesians 4:7-12 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up . . .

The Greek word Paul uses for "men" in this passage is "Anthropos." According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, "Anthropos" is used generally for a human being, male or female, without reference to sex or nationality.

In other words, he was not giving the leadership gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher to just males but to "all men," both male and female, to prepare God's people for service and to build them up.

Understanding Paul's Concerns and Corrections

Most of the limitations put on women in the church come from the misinterpretation of Paul's correction to certain abuses and heresies that were taking place in the church at Corinth and Ephesus. Paul's correction was never meant to be applied as a blanket prohibition against women using their gifts in the church. This would contradict the other teachings of Paul encouraging women to prophesy in the church; the example of both Old and New Testament women; and the original plan God instituted in the beginning. We need to understand the context, and what Paul was trying to correct, or we end up with an erroneous interpretation that Paul never intended.

The Challenge of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

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.

There are basically three ways people interpret this passage.

Interpretation #1

Some believe this teaches that women are not allowed to teach or minister in the church. There are variations of how this is applied in churches that adopt this view. But this flies in the face of the broader biblical examples with the theme of women ministering. Plus, it directly conflicts with Paul's encouraging both men and women to prophesy, which was something done in the church. Is Paul taking back what he said earlier – that women can participate in the church service? That doesn't make sense. This also fails to look at the context of what was happening in the church that Paul was addressing. It also goes against God's original intent of men and women partnering and ministering together, as we see in Genesis. Taking all this into consideration, I don't think this is what Paul was trying to communicate at all.

Interpretation #2

Some believe this passage is dealing with a local issue of how disruptive wives were being in the church service.

The Greek word for women in verse 34 is "*gune*," and indicates either a woman generically speaking or a wife, depending on the context. It should be translated "wives" here because it stands in contrast to the Greek word "*aner*", meaning husbands, in verse 35. "Aner" can also be translated men in general, but in this context, it is properly translated as husband.

In verse 34 the Greek word for silent is "*sigao*", which means quietness, tongue control, or not speaking at inappropriate times. It was a directive for wives to know when to keep quiet, to control their tongue so as not to be disruptive.

This is not a directive that women should not speak in the church, because in the same letter Paul says women may prophesy – which is a public activity of sharing God's message with the congregation. (1 Corinthians 11:5)

Evidently there was a problem with how some wives were conducting themselves in the church services. Their new-found freedom in Christ to speak in church was causing problems.

Men and women sat separately in the service, and the wives may have been disruptive in calling out questions to their husbands during the service. So, to bring some order, Paul was telling them not to speak at inappropriate times, or to wait until they got home to ask their husbands.

Another possibility is that the wives may not have been considerate and respectful of their husbands in how they were using their gifts. The way they were running over their husbands was disgraceful.

Paul may be saying he will not permit a woman who is not submissive to her husband's headship to speak in the church. She must learn to receive from him at home first.

In this passage he is addressing wives specifically, not women in general. He is not limiting the role of women but bringing order to the church service.

Interpretation #3

Some believe Paul is actually challenging the Corinthian leaders to release women in this passage. The Corinthian men were not releasing the women to serve alongside them. He is appealing for the men to recognize the calling and anointing that rests on women as well as men. In the Montgomery Translation it reads this way:

“In your congregation” you write, “as in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak. On the contrary let them be subordinate, as also says the law. And if they want to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. “What was it from you that the word of God went forth, or to you only did it come?”

He is saying “You Corinthians say, let your women keep silent in the churches . . .”

Paul is challenging their bias because the law never says that. They added these things to their interpretation of the law in the Talmud. He rebukes them in verse 36. *“Did the word of God originate with you?”* Who are you to suppress women and tell them they can’t speak in church. Who are you to make up this law?

Schleusner, in his Greek-Latin Lexicon, supports this view. He states this passage refers to the Talmud – also known as the oral law or Jewish traditions – but no precept considering this matter exists. In other words, no law exists that forbids women to speak in public, and Paul was confronting them on this. Paul was not establishing a new law or prohibition.

I believe the second or third interpretation of this text is the most accurate and the most consistent with Paul’s overall teaching and the testimony of scripture. Paul is dealing either with an issue of order as he wraps up the chapter by saying *“everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way,”* or with an issue of the Corinthians not releasing the gifts of women.

The Challenge of 1 Timothy 2:11-15

I 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 silent. 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.

Again, there are several interpretations of this passage.

Interpretation #1

Some believe Paul is saying women are not to take on a teaching role in the presence of men or any role where they might have authority or supervision over men. They believe this because Adam is ahead of her in the creation order, making her subservient, and because of her sin of deception in the garden. The implication is that women are more gullible and open to deception; therefore, she should not lead or teach.

The problem with this is that history proves men have been just as – if not more – gullible than women. The leaders of cults and false teachers are mostly male. The creation story of Adam and Eve also goes against this interpretation. Adam being created first did not make Eve subservient to him in the garden. They were equal partners, ruling together. Plus, Adam had the greater sin in that he knew better and yet in willful disobedience ate of the fruit. So, this interpretation is full of holes and is very biased against women, which is not Paul's spirit at all. This does not line up with the rest of scripture, so we must dig deeper to understand what Paul is saying.

Interpretation #2

Some believe Paul's concern was the development and teaching of doctrine. The Greek word for teach, "*didaskaleo*," means to instruct or teach doctrine. Doctrinal standards were being set by apostolic councils. (Acts 2:42; Acts 15)

This passage could be paraphrased to read "I do not permit a woman to teach doctrine contrary to that established by the apostles and in so doing usurp authority over them." Of course, this same admonition applies to men, so I don't think this is the main point here.

Interpretation #3

A more likely understanding is that Paul is dealing with some heresy from pagan worship seeping into the church and being promoted by some women.

A closer look at the Greek word for authority, which is "*authenteo*," helps provide some clarity. Some biblical scholars feel this Greek verb has been mistranslated to mean "*having authority over another*." This particular Greek word is not used anywhere else in the Bible. Other Greek words are used when referring to a person having authority over other people. This word has gone through several dramatic changes in how it was used during different periods in history. Many Greek Lexicons define it as trying to "usurp" authority. But, according to some scholars, if you dig deeper and look at how this word was used in Paul's day, we discover the most common meaning was "*to be the author or originator of something*."

This is significant because Ephesus was the world center of paganism governed by the female deity Artemis, whom the Romans called Diana. Diana was worshipped as the creator of life and had great influence on the culture. This cult taught the superiority of the female and advocated female domination of the male. They taught that women were the originators of mankind. They taught that Eve gave birth to Adam, and that she was the source of knowledge; also, that Eve was enlightened and not deceived in the garden. Women were taking authority over men in all of society. A group of Jewish Gnostics was also teaching something similar about the superiority of women, and these ideas were infiltrating the church. Paul is coming against a teaching that was contrary to the truth of creation and scripture.

Paul is saying he will not allow women to teach that they are the originators of man. They must stop teaching this, for Adam was formed first and then Eve. Eve was not enlightened but was deceived and sinned, contrary to the cult's teaching. He is not saying women cannot teach. He is addressing a pagan doctrine that women were promoting in the church. They were not allowed to teach this false doctrine in the church.

The issue is not that women cannot supervise or be in a role of authority over a man. That is not the issue Paul is addressing. The Greek word Paul uses does not support that interpretation. He is addressing the "originator lie," not whether women can be given authority in the church.

This is the most likely interpretation, taking into consideration the social context of what was going on with the people Paul was writing to. It is true to the Greek, and lines up with Paul's other teachings concerning women.

Interpretation #4

Some believe this is referring to the husband-wife relationship similar to what Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 14. Again, in this passage, the Greek word for woman ("*gune*") indicates either a woman generically speaking or a wife, depending on the context. It can be translated "wife" here because it stands in contrast to the Greek word for a man ("*aner*"), which is often translated husband, as it was in 1 Corinthians 14:35.

A later meaning given to the word authority ("*authenteo*"), which some scholars prefer, means to "*usurp*" or "*domineer*." In this case, it would seem Paul's concern was with a woman using her authority in a wrong way.

It can be interpreted that Paul would not allow a wife to teach who was not in right relationship with her husband. He would not allow her to usurp authority over her husband. She could teach only when in right relationship to him.

It can also be interpreted that he was speaking to women in general about their relationship to men in ministry. The issue is not that women or wives cannot speak, teach, or be leaders in the

church, but that they must be in right relationship to their husbands, or to male authority. Paul did allow women to teach with authority, but not in a domineering or usurping way.

In verse 12, the Greek word for silent (*“hesuchia”*) means quiet, proper, peaceable. This does not mean wives or women are not allowed to talk in church, but that they are to learn in a proper and peaceable way, not in an overbearing way that disrespects their husband or male leadership.

Summary

We see that an interpretation that takes into account the custom, culture, context, and original language leads us to an affirmation and release of the gifts of women alongside men in a spirit of mutual honor. I believe this was God’s original plan; the unfolding scripture story affirms it, Jesus came to redeem it, and we need to embrace it – to see the kingdom come in greater measure among us.

The reference I Timothy 2:15 of women being saved through childbearing refers to the promised salvation and redeeming work of the one born of woman who would crush the head of the oppressor. The Christ child is the seed of the woman as promised in Genesis. Women are to walk in the salvation that comes from Jesus in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.

For too long we have lived under the curse of broken humanity, where women have been victimized, sexualized, oppressed, and put into a religious box under the control of patriarchal leadership. It’s time to learn to walk according to God’s original plan. Yes, we will stumble, and struggle to get it right. But let’s set our hearts on the goal of being joint heirs with Christ in the fullness of his kingdom.

Roles, Authority, and Responsibility

We need to discuss what it looks like for men and women to lead together. The Bible does reveal certain roles of authority and responsibility in the kingdom. When this is ignored, it brings confusion and disorder. Some refer to this as the principle of headship that God has ordained in his creation.

Headship is a sovereign practical role God instituted for the function of a healthy team. Every healthy team has a clearly defined leader who can make the final decision if necessary. The role of the team leader is to draw out the wisdom and gifts of each team member so everyone is functioning at their full capacity and ability.

The concept of a team leader – or headship principle – was established before creation and before the fall. We see this principle in the Trinity, descending through seraphim, cherubim, archangels, angels, man, and lesser creatures. There is divine order even in the Godhead. The Son and Holy Spirit acknowledge the role of the Father as the head. They are still equal in the

Godhead but with differing roles, authority, and responsibility in how they relate and honor each other.

We see this implanted into the creation process. God could have made Adam and Eve at the same time. Eve was not an afterthought of God. It was designed to illustrate the principle of Adam's primary leadership in the home, and men's protective headship role. Adam was the head, but they took dominion together and exercised authority and leadership together. Both were created equally as persons but with different functions. This headship principle is true in the church as well.

You may be thinking I am contradicting what I said earlier about men and women being equal partners. But I am not. The biblical idea of headship is far different from how we often use it today. We use it at times for male control and to make women subservient. The deeper meaning is that of source and life-flow as well as authority. It is of provision and serving, not being served.

Like the head waters of a river, Father God releases life to the Son and Spirit, Adam to Eve, and men to the daughters of God on the earth.

God places headwaters (headship) over us to bless us and call us forth to our full potential. There is recognized authority in this, but the authority is to protect, bless, release, and lead – never to control or oppress.

1 Corinthians 11:3 But now 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.

Ephesians 5:23 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.

Replace the word "head" with the word "headwaters" and read these verses again. This deepens the meaning of this word and concept. For instance, God has given a husband certain authority and responsibility as the head, but it is to pour life into his wife and to raise her up in her gifts to serve alongside as an equal partner.

Paul is not saying that a man is head over every woman simply because of his gender. He is head over his wife in the home and those men and women placed directly under his leadership in the church. In certain jobs and roles, a woman can have supervision and authority over a man. The issue then is how she uses her authority.

An interesting side note is that Jesus placed all males on his team of 12 apostles. These particular twelve are a separate category from all other apostles. There may have been symbolism in choosing male leaders to represent the 12 tribes of Israel around the throne. (Matt 19:28) Jesus

was not biased against women, and there were women apostles later in the church. It seems there was a divine order in his Kingdom that he wished to honor. The fact that Jesus did not include a woman among the 12 does not disqualify women as apostles. He didn't include gentiles or others either.

God has created men and women differently in many ways. The Bible clearly teaches manhood and womanhood, masculinity and femininity, differing roles and responsibilities, headship and submission. When understood and practiced properly, it becomes a beautiful display of God's grace, freedom, goodness, and image among us.

The Apostle Paul also emphasizes the interdependence of men and women. Both are needed in the work of the kingdom. They are to work side by side. Neither can act in a superior way over the other.

1 Cor. 11:11 In the Lord, nevertheless, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

Other Issues

One of the scriptural qualifications for a leader mentions the male gender. Does this disqualify women from eldership or leadership?

1 Timothy 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife . . . (NIV 1984) (Titus 1:6)

To interpret this, we must ask this question: Was the issue that a person must be married and a male to be a leader, or was the issue polygamy? I believe it was polygamy, because it was common in that culture. This was addressed to men because it was unheard of for a woman to be polygamous, with many husbands. We can also ask this question: Can a single person be a leader? Or must they be the husband of a wife, based on this verse? There are many single leaders, so by implication this verse does not limit a woman either. Nowhere does it say that all leaders must be married or male.

In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul mentions female elders (presbutera) alongside male elders (presbuteroi). Translators often assume that the passage is just referring to older men and older women and translate it that way, but Paul uses the same word for elder later in the same chapter. There is also historical evidence that there were women elders in the early church. Women were ordained to positions of leadership by the laying on of hands until the Church Council of Laodicea forbade it in 363 AD.

Is God Male

God is neither male nor female. He is Spirit and has created male and female in his creation to deposit his likeness and image. So, in one sense, he is as much female as he is male, but for his own sovereign reason he has chosen to identify himself to us as male. At times in the scriptures he is referred to with female qualities, which is part of his image, but he asks us to address him as Father. Jesus describes him to us as Father and tells us to pray to him as our Father. This does not mean that men are superior to women or that women have fewer of God's qualities than men. For God's own reason, he has chosen to reveal and relate to us as male. We have no right to change this, to address him as "mother god," or to change the language in the Bible that is clearly masculine to accommodate our cultural and personal preferences. God is Father and the church is the bride of Christ. We men have to accept the biblical assertion that we are brides!

Conclusion

The overwhelming evidence of sound biblical interpretation, scriptural examples of women in leadership, as well as present-day examples, reveals God's intent for both men and women to take dominion and to rule and lead together.

Women with the proper gifts, callings, anointing, and qualifications should be able to serve in key leadership positions in the governmental structure of the church.

The focus in all of this is not on the promotion of women. We don't put women in leadership roles because they are women or because of an agenda, quota, or for token representation. We set them in leadership when they are the best person for the job, and they have the calling, right attitude, and gifts. We then need to believe in them and have their backs.

I respect the fact that churches, leaders, and members come out at different places in this matter. After much study and soul-searching, I have come to the conclusion that women can serve as elders, assistant pastors, associate pastors, co-pastors, executive pastors, senior pastors, and on apostolic teams. They can be licensed and ordained in affirmation of their calling and anointing.

In our network of churches, we honor the principle of headship by having the primary apostolic leader be a male leader.

A great model of ministry for churches is to see both a husband and wife credentialled and serving together as co-pastors when both have the calling and gifting for this role.

Women remain the greatest untapped resource of the Kingdom. They need to be released in order for the church to reap the harvest that is ripe and waiting. I apologize to and ask forgiveness of all the women who have been wounded and made to feel "less than" and sidelined. I am sorry for the bias and the way we have misused scripture in the church to limit the gifts and roles of

women. The church will never rise to its glory and full stature until women are restored to the side of men as God intended from the beginning. Let's lead together!

A Word of Caution and Appeal

Pushing, and trying to force churches and leaders to adopt one's interpretation and understanding, is usually counterproductive and divisive. I remember my reaction to those who tried to pressure me into these things. I also remember when God convicted me to be the headwaters for my wife and others by standing up for them and making a way for them even when it brought pain and criticism to me. I did get pushback, but leaders are called to be courageous and to lead the way. I recognized my accountability to God in how I led our church and network of churches – to either suppress or release women into their divine gifts and callings.

If you, as a woman, feel limited in your present situation, consider ways to use your gifts beyond structured church programs. There are many parachurch ministries and other opportunities where you can use your gifts. You don't need a title or position within the church to be used of God with the gifts he has given you. Think creatively.

My hope is that this booklet can be a source of dialogue about this subject. My hope is for mutual respect. There are some honest differences in how we interpret some of these passages as we attempt to be faithful to the Word and rightly divide the Word of Truth. Join me in asking the Holy Spirit to continue to teach us the mind of God. We may have different traditions, but each can find a way to more effectively release this precious resource of women in our midst.



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