

There are various views held by faithful, Spirit-filled, God-fearing, Bible-based Christians in the church today on this issue. The reality is that we may never see this matter the same way, so We must come to a place of mutual respect in the body of Christ. We can find a place of mutual honor that does not divide us.

Let's be careful we don't become too rigid in our belief on this issue. This is not a primary issue for unity and salvation in the Kingdom of God.

There are basically four views, with variations, of how the scriptures are interpreted and applied to women in leadership.

**View One:** Women should never teach or lead in a setting with men.

**View Two:** Women can teach and lead – but without credentials or with limited credentials – as long as there is clear accountability to male leadership in the church.

**View Three:** Women can teach and lead in almost all leadership roles – and be fully credentialed – as long as there is clear male leadership related to them in the church.

**View Four:** Women can teach and lead in all leadership roles – and be fully credentialed – without male leadership oversight.

Each of these views can be supported with scripture, depending on your interpretation. However, there are several key areas to be aware of, and that need to be considered, when arriving at one's interpretation and belief regarding women in leadership.

**First,** we need to be honest about any bias we may have that might taint our ability to look openly at the scriptures. For instance, some people react to the feminist attitudes that sometimes come through those insisting on their equal rights. The feminist ideology and attitude is wrong, but we can't use their misguided agenda to ignore

those with a right attitude and motive toward women in leadership. We also need to recognize that sometimes women are responding out of woundedness from oppressive male leadership that does not recognize and affirm their gifts or callings.

**Second,** we believe all scripture is divinely inspired and inerrant, but proper interpretation of these scriptures needs to include a study and understanding of context and culture. Some people make no room for cultural application to some of Paul's admonitions about women, which is poor exegesis of these passages. For instance, most churches teach and understand that Paul's teaching on women wearing a head covering is related to Corinthian culture and doesn't have the same application today. The same consideration of cultural implication is needed in order to properly interpret Paul's other instructions concerning women. Sound biblical interpretation must always take into account cultural factors as well as good translation of the text.

**Third,** biblical integrity also requires us to study the original Hebrew and Greek languages to arrive at an accurate understanding of what the writers were trying to communicate. For

instance, at one point Paul encourages women to prophesy in the public service and in another passage it seems as if he is telling them to keep quiet. A close look at the Greek words he was using makes clear what he was really addressing and trying to communicate. In some cases the original language does not give clear direction either way and one must look at the larger context. Failure to take the original language into consideration can lead to misconstrued interpretations and unbiblical limitations on women that God never intended.

### Some Observations From Scripture

#### 1. God's original plan is for men and women to work together as equal partners.

Before sin corrupted their relationship, Adam and Eve ruled together as a team. God said to "them" to subdue the earth and rule over it.

*Gen 1:27-28 So God created man 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." (NIV)*

They were both commissioned by God to subdue and rule the earth.

By the creation order God established Adam as the head of his home, but they took dominion together and exercised authority and leadership together. (I Tim. 2:12-13)

Eve was an equal part of the team – they were real partners. Woman is referred to as a "suitable helper." (Gen. 2:20-21)

Helper is the name given to the Holy Spirit and, in other places, to Almighty God. He is our helper! He is along our side! This does not make him inferior or subservient to us. 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. God's will is for men and women to serve side by side with an equal mandate to rule.

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

*Gen 3:16 . . . Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (NIV)*

**Desire** ("teshugah") **Rule** ("mashal") 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'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. He came to ransom and restore us

back to our position with God and each other.

## **2. Women were involved with Jesus in ministry.**

They were part of the larger group of disciples that followed Jesus around. This was unusual in that teachers did not have women disciples following them in those days.

He broke the stereotypes and confronted the cultural biases of his day toward women.

Jesus was always very kind to and open with women. He restored their dignity and worth. They were with him 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 is still asking them to proclaim his message to all people. The great commission to preach the gospel is a commission to both men and women. (Matt. 28:5-10; Mk. 16:15-18)

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. 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. Only together can they take dominion.

## **3. In the early church women were involved in leadership.**

They are mentioned as deaconesses and prophetesses, which were public ministry roles in the church. (Phoebe - Rom. 16:1-2; Phillip's four daughters - Acts 21:9)

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

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

Evidently the two women, Euodia and Syntyche, that Paul speaks 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 role 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. (Cols. 4:15)

Paul refers to Chloe's household in I Cor. 1:11.

In II John 1 a "chosen 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 of the church in her home. She was charged by John to protect the church that met in her home from

false teachers.

In I Tim. 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. It is possible he was referring to women in the leadership role of elder in this text.

Junias is listed as outstanding among the apostles. Junias can be translated as a male or female name. Some scholars think Junias may have been a woman and served as an apostle in the church. It is also possible Junias was a man who served prison time with Paul. (Romans 16:7)

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. (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 on the nation. (2 Kings 22:14)

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.

#### **4. Jesus did not include women in his team of twelve apostles.**

There are many other apostles listed in the scripture beside these twelve and some may have been women. 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.

Jesus may have been recognizing the divine-creation principle of male headship over the church as a whole.

The fact is, we do not know why he chose only men for this special office. We do know he embraced women on a whole new level and brought them alongside him in ministry, which was revolutionary for his day.

He did not include gentiles on his team of apostles either. This doesn't mean they can't be apostles, so we can't read too much into this.

**5. One of the scriptural qualifications for a leader mentions the male gender.**

*I Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife . . . (NIV)*

The question we must ask in interpreting this is . . . was the issue that a person must be married and a male to be a leader, or was the issue polygamy? Can a single person be a leader? If so, a woman can be a leader also.

A problem they were having in the early church, and that still persists in some countries today, is polygamy. This is the issue that Paul was addressing.

Nowhere does it say that all leaders must be married or male.

**6. 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." (NIV)*

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.

**7. The ascension leadership gifts are given to both men and women.**

*Eph. 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 . . ." (NIV)*

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

In other words, Jesus 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.

**8. The I Corinthians 14:34-35 passage is dealing with a local issue of how wives were relating to their husbands in the church service.**

*1 Cor. 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. (NIV)*

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 husband.

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

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. (I Cor. 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, in order 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.

## **9. The I Timothy 2:11-15 passage has several possible interpretations.**

*1 Tim 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 . . .” (NIV)*

**One interpretation** comes from a study of the Greek word for teach, “**didaskaleo**,” which 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, too.

**Another interpretation** comes from a closer look at the Greek word for authority which is “**authenteo**.” 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 one’s having authority over people.

This word has gone through several dramatic changes in how it was used during different periods in history. By looking at how this word was used in Paul’s day, we discover the meaning was “*to be the originator or author of*.”

This is significant because in Ephesus during this period, the female deity Artemis or Diana was worshipped, and had a great influence on the culture. This cult taught the superiority of the female, and that women were the originator of mankind. They taught that Eve gave birth to Adam and that she was the source of knowledge. Paul is coming against this teaching that was contrary to the truth of creation.

Paul is saying he will not allow women to teach that they are the originator of man. They must stop teaching this, for Adam was formed first and then Eve. He is not saying women cannot teach. He is addressing this pagan doctrine that women were promoting in the church.

**Another common interpretation** of this passage comes from the Greek word for woman and man. 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 man (“**aner**”), often translated husband as it was in I Corinthians 14:35.

However, we must acknowledge this passage can also be understood to mean men or women in general. The Greek can be interpreted both ways. It can be interpreted that Paul would not allow a wife to teach who was not in subjection to 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 male authority.

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 headship.

Paul uses the creation account to explain why women do not have headship over men.

Whenever creation is used as the basis for a teaching, it means it is a universal principle.

This headship principle was established before the fall of Adam and Eve. It was designed 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 and women's role in the church.

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.

Equality in salvation, and dignity and worth to God, are clearly biblical truths of great importance for both men and women. Jesus restored women to their position alongside men as co-heirs.

*Gal. 3:28-29 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (NIV)*

This verse teaches equal salvation without distinction to male or female. The context of this verse is not speaking to leadership roles nor matters of headship. If it were, then based on this verse, you could throw out headship in the home as well as the church. (Some make a distinction between the home and the church and don't believe the headship principle applies to the ecclesiastical church realm.)

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.

In Eph. 5:23 and I Cor. 11:1-12, Paul very clearly explains that man is the head of woman just as Christ is the head of man in the governmental order of God's kingdom.

*Eph. 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." (NIV)*

*I Cor. 11:3 "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." (NIV)*

(Some interpret the word head to mean "source" instead of authority or leader.)

Again in this passage, the creation order is used as the basis for man's headship role.

*I Cor. 11:8-9 "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." (NIV)*

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.



*1 Cor. 11:11 “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.” (NIV)*

The concern about lack of biblical understanding and deception among women is also mentioned by Paul in I Timothy 2:14. The issue was not that women were more gullible, but that they needed to first learn the scriptures before trying to teach. Women in this culture did not have much of an opportunity to learn. They were open to deception, like Eve, unless they first became grounded in the Word.

## **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 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.

Women can serve as elders, assistant pastors, associate pastors, co-pastors, senior pastors, and on apostolic teams, and should enjoy the full support and affirmation of clearly defined male headship.

Women walking within this understanding can be licensed and ordained in affirmation of their calling and anointing.

The reality is that not all churches have this understanding, nor are they affirming of women in leadership. To try to force change does not work. To ignore the need for change is irresponsible leadership. Let’s find ways to release and affirm each other in our gifts and callings, both men and women.

Knowing the diversity of our network of churches, we have adopted the following policy to guide us and to respect the varying convictions. We ask that we respect one another for our differences, both in the network and as we relate to churches around us. Let’s walk humbly before our God.

## **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POLICY**

We recognize that there are a variety of understandings and interpretations of Scripture regarding a woman’s role in church leadership. We have decided not to let this become an issue, and cause us to lose our focus on fulfilling the Great Commission. We need to honor one another, even though we may not all have the same understanding. We affirm women’s role and perspective in ministry to the body of Christ. There is a female side to God’s wisdom that male leaders need to hear that often comes through our wives and godly women in the church. While the vast number of leadership roles in the Bible were held by men, there are instances of women in governmental leadership roles as well. The Hopewell Network of Churches will license and ordain women to

various leadership roles with the following guidelines:

We will continue to honor the Biblical principle of male headship requiring every woman in leadership to be accountable to a male leader over her. Since final spiritual authority rests with our Network Leader and Network Spiritual Advisors, we will reserve these positions for male leadership to honor this principle.

If the leadership team of a local church believes a woman is called of the Lord to serve in a leadership role in their congregation, and they can affirm her in faith according to their understanding of Scripture, then she should be appointed to serve in accordance with the guidelines for leaders in our network.

If the leadership team of a local church does not have the faith to appoint a woman to a leadership role in their church according to their understanding of Scripture, then she should not serve in that capacity in that church.

If the Network Leadership Team believes a woman is being called of God to serve on the Network Leadership Team, and the members of the team confirm it, as well as others involved in the process, she should then serve.

If any pastor cannot with clear conscience receive direct oversight from a woman, he should only work under one of the men serving on the Network Leadership Team.

\*Recommended Reference:  
The Ministry of Women by Kevin J. Conner

