

Women, Leadership And The Scriptures

(Examining issues surrounding the appointment of women to leadership roles in the church.)

Why This Paper Was Written.

Westlake church in Nyon, Switzerland is an International church made up of people from more than 30 different nationalities around the world. Because we are internationals, we come from different Christian traditions, some of which have historically accepted women in leadership roles, and some of which have not. As an independent church, we have no denominational guidelines to follow. Therefore, our statement of faith and practice, which our people commit to before becoming members, assumes importance when we negotiate an issue such as this.

Our first article in our statement of faith reads ***“The divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures as originally given, and their supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.”*** For some Christians, the tradition of the church assumes importance. For others, the current mood of society strongly influences church polity. But for us as an evangelical church, any discussion on the role of women in church leadership must centre on our understanding of the scriptures.

When I came to Westlake as Pastor in 2008, I made a point of listening to more than 100 people from the church, both in group and individual meetings. In every group meeting, unprompted by me, there would be someone who would raise the question “Why can’t women be Elders at Westlake?” The question of women Elders has been simmering beneath the surface in this church for a long time. It’s time for us to examine the scriptures and discuss this issue openly.

This paper was prepared by me for the Elders at their request, so that we could study the scriptures together. It is not meant to be the last word on the subject. I have sought to fairly present both sides of the argument from scripture, although I defy anyone to write a completely objective paper without letting their own convictions show!

I come from a denomination that ordained their first women Pastor in 1928. Since the late 1980’s I have been the Pastor of churches where women have served as Elders. Although I freely admit I am not a theologian, I have read extensively books and papers written by eminent evangelical theologians on both sides of this thorny issue. And most of all, I have tried to be honest in my interpretation of the scriptures as I have studied the relevant material.

My prayer for you is that you will study this subject with an open Bible and an open mind.

David McChesney
Pastor
Westlake Church
Nyon, Switzerland.
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How We Interpret The Scriptures.

Every so often someone will say, often with great feeling, “You don’t have to interpret the scriptures. You just have to read them and do what they say.” But every one of us automatically interprets everything we read according to our culture. For example, when we read the word “flesh” in Romans 13:14 – “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts”, most people in English speaking cultures would think Paul is talking about bodily appetites. But the word “flesh” in Paul’s writings seldom refers to the body, but to our sinful nature. In addition, the translations we read from are themselves an interpretation by scholars, or groups of scholars, of their best understanding of the contemporary meaning of the original text.

Some in today’s church who argue that women should keep silent in church on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 at the same time deny the validity of speaking in tongues and prophecy, the very context in which the “silence” passage occurs. And those who affirm on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 that women and men should pray and prophesy, usually deny that women must do so with their heads covered.

There are some basic rules of interpretation, which if ignored, lead us into all sorts of trouble. When we read a passage of scripture, we need to ask ourselves about its **context** and its **content**.

Context.

- **Historical context.** It helps us understand Paul's teaching about long hair and head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 if we understand that in that historical context, loose or flowing hair on a woman sent ambiguous signals about their morality or sexuality. Long hair on Greek men led to suspicions of homosexuality. Understanding the historical context of Paul's letters to the churches makes a great difference to our interpretation of them.
- **Literary context.** Words only have meaning in sentences, and sentences have meaning when we read the sentences before them and after them. We need to ask the question of every sentence and every paragraph "What's the point? What is the author saying, and why is he saying it right here?" The goal is to find out what the author was saying to the original situation.

Content.

The content question deals with the meanings of words, and the grammatical relationships in sentences. For example, the use of the word "head" in the English language has clear connotations of authority. The "head" of a company is the Boss. But the Bible wasn't written in English, but in Greek. The Greek term for "head" (kephale) may refer to the part of our anatomy that sits on our shoulders. But it is hotly debated amongst Greek scholars about what it means when "head" is used figuratively. It may mean "authority", or it may mean "life source". As "head" of the church (Ephesians 1:22, 4:15) do we understand that to mean Christ is the authority of the church, or Christ is the life source of the church? Meanings of words change as language changes. In English, the word "gay" used to only mean "merry" or "carefree". Now it has also taken on the meaning of "attraction to the same sex".

Contemporary Significance.

Before we ask the question of what the scripture means to us here and now, we must first determine what was meant for the readers then. If we don't discover the original intent of the biblical text, then every biblical text can mean whatever we want it to mean. When this happens, biblical interpretation becomes totally subjective. Who is to say whose interpretation is right and whose is wrong? Anything goes. Mormons baptise for the dead, Jehovah's Witnesses reject the deity of Christ, prosperity teachers teach a prosperity doctrine, all on the basis of ignoring the original meaning of scripture. They have started with the "here and now" and have read into the text 'meanings' that were not originally intended. A text cannot mean what it never meant when it was originally written.¹

Progressive Revelation. Creation – Fall – Redemption.

One of the basic premises of this paper is that God's revelation of himself is progressive. His original intention and purpose for mankind is reflected in creation as described in Genesis 1 & 2. The introduction of sin through the fall of Adam and Eve caused a disruption of God's creation order (Genesis 3-11). God then formed a covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12 – to the end of the Old Testament) in preparation for the new covenant (the New Testament) which is the restoration of God's original purposes. Thus, the message of the whole bible can be expressed in three concepts which are in a continuum – **Creation – Fall – Redemption**. Because of his love and persistence, Jesus came to redeem and restore everything that was damaged and lost through the fall.

If this **creation – fall – redemption** model is adhered to, a coherent method of interpretation emerges from the scripture itself. Biblical texts that pertain to each phase (creation or fall or redemption) are to be interpreted within their specific frame of reference. This eliminates the hodgepodge method of taking verses from various time frames and bringing them together in a collage to make them say what they do not teach in their original settings. Often this "cut and paste" approach to the Bible is popular among the very people who claim to honour the Bible as God's Word. If we are to treat God's Word with the integrity it deserves, it must be interpreted in relation to its historical setting or its particular context.

¹ For a fuller treatment of biblical interpretation see "How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth"- Gordon D Fee and Douglas Stuart. (Zondervan)

Five Different Positions.

The question that divides evangelicals is this: ***“Does the Bible teach an abiding principle which places limits on women in church leadership, or not?”***

This issue has been debated by evangelical theologians in great depth and with considerable feeling for many years. Both groups firmly believe the Bible is God’s Word, and esteem it highly. Both groups have written numerous books, articles and theological papers covering the issues in depth. Both groups can quote ‘heavyweight’ theologians who support their views.²

• Where Do Evangelicals Agree?

When it comes to the issue of gender in regard to the church, evangelical Christians agree on a number of foundational convictions. First, there is the acknowledgment that both genders are created in the ‘image of God’ (Gen 1.26-27) and thus that both males and females are of equal dignity, value, and worth. Second, there is the shared belief that since all Christians – male and female – have the Holy Spirit within them, all believers are gifted by God for ministry within the body of Christ. With this diversity of giftings come numerous possible ministry callings.

This question of the role of women in leadership has emerged in many sectors of the twentieth-century church. The Roman Catholic Church, continuing its tradition, allows only males to be ordained to the priesthood. In the 1900’s, however, the Church of England opened the door to women’s ordination. Evangelical denominations remain divided on this issue. Throughout the twentieth-century, Pentecostal churches tended to support the idea of women in pastoral roles. A number of conservative denominations, however, have retained the teaching that ordained pastors should be men.

Position 1: The Silent, Submissive Majority (Complimentarian)

The extreme end of this view holds that women have virtually no public ministry in terms of exercising authority or verbally participating in the meetings of the church. They are allowed to teach males in mixed Sunday school classes, but only until the boys reached an age determined as being ‘adult’ (typically 13 years old). Then they have to be taught by men.

Women also may be involved in ministries to children and other women, but not to men and not in the context of the full church. This view depends on such texts as 1 Cor 11.3: ‘Christ is the *head* of every man, and the man is the *head* of a woman;’ 1 Cor 14.34-35; ‘the woman must keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves...for it is improper for a woman to speak in church;’ and 1 Tim 2.11-12: ‘Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise *authority* over a man, but to remain quiet.’ As a consequence, evangelical women, forming the majority of the evangelical church, have not preached, taught, or exercised pastoral leadership in their churches (including eldership).

Position 2: The Missionary Exception

Among those evangelicals who have subscribed to Position 1, there have been some who have supported an even more significant exception that decidedly has not proven the rule. This is the exception made for female missionaries, especially for those going to Third World, ‘pagan’ countries. In this situation, women have exercised all the teaching and leadership gifts they have been able to draw upon as they have pioneered Christianity in the most inhospitable places. Women have evangelised, taught, and disciplined entire villages and regions. With this success, many women naturally have gone on to preside over the establishment of churches and the training of leaders.

Under Position 2, the rationale goes as follows:

1. Women in this case are not leading a church *per se* because one is just being founded, and thus the situation does not fall under the biblical prescriptions against church leadership.
2. Once a church has been established, indigenous male leadership takes over and the female missionary is obliged to withdraw from all public ministry therein.

² For a fuller treatment see Pages 225-235 “Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology”. By Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002, 287 pp.

These evangelicals have recognised that point 1 is much stronger than point 2. The second point still allows a woman to teach men and to exercise authority over men, sometimes for years.

What is the justification for this model? The missionary exception is said to be justified because the need for evangelism is so great that if men won't pursue it, women should (a perennial reality!). It follows that as a result of female missionary work men are scolded for not taking up their rightful part in the missionary enterprise, rather than re-evaluating the role of women 'back home.'

Position 3: The Para-church Parenthesis

Many evangelicals who would not have women teach or lead in churches have sent millions of dollars, not to mention their sons and daughters, to the wide range of evangelical parachurch groups that sprang up after World War 2. In many of these parachurch groups, however, women have often exercised the same functions as men: they have taught Scriptures, presided over worship services, provided spiritual counsel, and sat on the executive boards of local chapters and national organisations.

Such parachurch organisations include groups such as IVCF, YFC, ISCF, SCM, Student Life, CCC, etc, all of which welcome women onto its staff. The justification for this practice is that these ministries are not church but simply free fellowships of Christians meeting in the name of the Lord to witness and encourage. That is, because these ministries are basically evangelistic organisations, not a church, the biblical teachings about the subordination of women in church do not apply.

Position 4: The 'Under Authority' Arrangement

This understanding says women can exercise public gifts of teaching and preaching, whether in churches, Bible schools, parachurch groups, and so on, as long as they are 'under the authority' of male leadership. The concern here is to honour such biblical texts as 1 Cor 11.3; Eph 5.22-24; and 1 Tim 2.12, which have been understood as forbidding a Christian woman to exercise authority over a Christian man, and in particular forbidding a Christian wife to exercise authority over her Christian husband. The 'anti-teaching' passages are seen to be of local application, that is, applying only to the specific instance Paul was addressing in his Epistles.

This model has much in common with Position 5 (Equal Partners in Ministry), but still retains a key distinctive of Position 1 (The Silent, Submissive Majority), that is, male headship.

In practice this position has tended to support married couples in ministry. Married women under the authority of their husbands were much more welcome to serve than were single women in nineteenth-century America, a time when this model was popular. Following this model, women have been free to fill any office of the church except the highest, whether deacon, elder, pastor, or priest. They have preached, but only under the authority of male authorities - ecclesiastical always, and marital where applicable.

Position 5: Equal Partners in Ministry (Egalitarian)

At the other end of the spectrum lies the view that gender makes no difference in the church. God gifts people for public ministry without regard to gender, and God has done so throughout history. Evangelicals have supported this model on the basis of such texts as Gal 3.27-28, 'all of you...were baptised into Christ...There is neither...male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus;' The descriptions of spiritual gifts in the Pauline writings nowhere links gifts of teaching or leadership to men (c.f. 1 Corinthians 12, 14; Ephesians 4.7-16); and the fact that women exercised leadership throughout the New Testament (e.g. Priscilla in Acts 18.26; Phoebe as a deacon, Junia as an apostle in Rom 16.1,7). All of this is consistent with the prophecy cited by Peter on the first post-ascension Pentecost, that God promised to pour out his Spirit on men and women in the last days (Acts 2.17-18, c.f. Joel 2.28-29). According to this model, evangelical women who have demonstrated that God gifted and called them to exercise gifts in public ministry have been free to do so. Egalitarians interpret the prohibition passages of 1 Corinthians 14.34-35 and 1 Timothy 2.11-12 as being specific to a particular church in a particular time and place, rather than having universal application for all time.

The Two Major Understandings – Complimentarian and Egalitarian.

Two evangelical organizations dedicated to these issues have emerged in recent years. The “**Council On Biblical Manhood And Womanhood**” champions the **Complimentarian view**. Complimentarians assert that males and females have different, complementary roles in the church and the home, and that leadership roles in the church are reserved for males only. “**Christians For Biblical Equality**”, on the other hand, holds to an **Egalitarian view**, that church leadership roles and roles in the home are determined by gifting rather than by gender.

1. The Complimentarian View In More Detail.

Created Equal, with Complementary Roles

The Complimentarian position holds that unlike most cultures throughout history, the Bible teaches the complete and full equality of men and women on the basis that they are equal in God’s sight. Both are made ‘in the image of God’ (Genesis 1.27). The Bible teaches that both men and women have equal dignity, worth, and responsibility before the Lord. This is why historically the status of women has almost always improved wherever Christianity has been received.

However, this is not to claim that men and women are to perform the same functions or to have identical roles in society, family, or church. God created male-female distinctions for a reason: they were to complement, not replicate, one another. This functional differentiation is obviously biological, but it is also taught in Scripture. Among other things, Scripture teaches that God’s design for men is to have primary spiritual authority in the church and in the home.

Biblical Basis

- **The Order Of Creation.**

Adam was created first. God created women to be the ‘helper’ and ‘partner’ of man (Gen 2.18). It was Adam who was given the mandate to care for the Garden *before* Eve was created (Gen 2.15). Eve was to share in his mandate (Gen 1.28), but she was to do so as a complementary helper to Adam (Gen 2.18). Adam alone was directed to rule the earth, hence Adam bore primary responsibility for carrying out the mandate (Gen 2.15-17; 3.17-19, c.f. Rom 5.12, 17-19). This functional differentiation between man and woman was reiterated even more intensely after the fall (Gen 3.16).

- **The Old Testament Leadership Role Of The Male.**

In the Old Testament, only males were permitted to appear before the Lord at the three great feasts each year (Deut 16.16-17), and only males were allowed to serve as priests before the Lord (Ex 28-29; Lev 8-9). Since only priests were allowed to teach the law (Lev 10.11), it is clear that this restriction implied that only males were allowed to give spiritual instruction.

- **The New Testament Model.**

Complimentarians see this model taught throughout the New Testament.

- Jesus chose twelve men to be the foundational spiritual leaders of the new community of God’s people.
- When Jesus sent out seventy people to further his ministry, he sent all men (Luke 10.1-16).
- When he gave his Great Commission to ‘teach’ all that he had commanded, he was speaking to his male apostles (Matt 28.16-20).
- Paul also reiterated that men alone are to be the spiritual leaders. Like Jesus, Paul restricts leadership roles to men. An overseer, Paul says, must be ‘the husband of but one wife’ and must ‘manage his own family well’ (1 Tim 3.2,4). Deacons also must be ‘men worthy of respect’ who are ‘the husband of but one wife’ (3.8, 12). Paul’s convictions are expressed even more explicitly in 1 Corinthians 11.3-16. In 1 Corinthians 11.3-5, 7-10 Paul appeals to God’s pre-fall, creational design. Several chapters later Paul makes another application of this same principle when he instructs the Corinthians that ‘women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says’ (1 Corinthians 14.34). Whatever else Paul meant it cannot be denied that he explicitly validates the teaching of the Old Testament that men alone are to be spiritual teachers (1 Corinthians 14.34). In 1 Timothy this teaching of Paul is repeated just as explicitly. Paul instructs women to ‘learn in silence with full submission’ (1 Tim 2.11).

- Complimentarians believe his instruction was intended for all Christians, in all cultures, at all times.

The heart of the complimentary understanding of scripture is that while men and women are equal in terms of their worth and dignity, they are gifted and called by God to carry out different roles. Men are called to be spiritual leaders; women are not. There is no value judgment in this differentiation. Men are in no respect superior because they are called to be spiritual leaders, any more than women are superior because they are able to bear children. The different roles are to complement, not compete with, one another.

Wider Evidence

In addition to biblical arguments several wider arguments are given. Here are a few of the more important ones.

The Trinity

The concept of complementary differences between equals is rooted in the Trinity. Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct from one another but equal to each other, for each is fully God. Yet there is a hierarchy within the Godhead – a functional subordination. The Father commands the Son and the Spirit (John 5.19, 30; 16.13). The Son commands the Spirit and is obedient to the Father, and the Spirit is sent by and is in submission to the Father and the Son. This functional subordination is where we derive our order of saying Father, Son and Spirit. Because the Trinity itself comprises three distinct but completely equal Persons with complementary roles, and because men and women are created in the image of this God, then here the Complementarian position finds a solid theological base.

Church History

While history or tradition is not determinative for doctrine, it is important. The Complementarian view has been the dominant view throughout church history. The church has always encouraged and valued the significant contributions of women in many areas of ministry, but the church has almost always forbidden women leaders until recently.

Sociology

Complimentarians are concerned that any undermining of the traditional male and female roles, both in families and in churches, will lead to a loss of order and stability with church and society. Complimentarians view a lack of leadership by males in the church and the family with increasing concern. Wayne Grudem, a strong advocate of the complimentary position, has written that he believes giving women roles of authority in the church is a blurring of gender distinctions which will have as an ultimate and inevitable consequence, the ordination of practicing homosexuals.³ Erosion of the traditional stance of the church rings alarm bells for Complimentarians.

The “Complementarian View” is best represented by theologian Wayne Grudem⁴ and the organisation he founded “The Council On Biblical Manhood and Womanhood” www.cbmw.org Unfortunately, Complimentarians label Egalitarians as “evangelical feminists”, an emotionally loaded and unhelpful term.

2. The Egalitarian View In More Detail.

The Irrelevance of Gender for Spiritual Authority

Egalitarians argue that through history God has temporarily acquiesced to many things he does not approve of in order to gradually move the world in a direction he does approve of. Two examples: God’s ideal from creation was monogamy. But in the Old Testament, and throughout history, God has tolerated and worked with those (King David, Solomon) in polygamous cultures in order to transform them over time (Gen 29). Similarly, God’s ideal has always been freedom for all people made in his image. Yet for centuries God tolerated and worked within systems of slavery in order to eventually overthrow them. We

³ Overview of central concerns- questions and answers – Question 41 - John Piper and Wayne Grudem – Restoring Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

⁴ “Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood – A response To Evangelical Feminism” edited by Wayne Grudem and John Piper. 1991 Crossway Books 485 pages.

would not now take the admonitions to slaves in Ephesians 6:5-9 and Titus 2:9 & 10 as a justification for the continuation of slavery. Yet such instructions are there in the writings of Paul.

Egalitarians see the subservient role of women to men, especially in regard to spiritual leadership, as an aspect of fallen culture that God wants to overthrow. God tolerated and worked within patriarchal cultures of both the Old and the New Testaments, but his ideal – and thus the ideal the church should be striving for – is for leadership to be based on gifts, not gender. Within this broader ideal, Egalitarians find biblical evidence for their stance.

Biblical Basis

- **Creation.**

Egalitarians believe there is no hint of a hierarchical order existing between man and woman in the creation account of Genesis, Chapters 1 and 2. They believe the exact opposite is clearly taught in these two chapters. Both man and woman were made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27) and they both participated in God-assigned ministries without any role distinctions (Genesis 1:28). The creation order established oneness, not hierarchy (Genesis 2:24). The first indication of a hierarchical order between man and woman resulted from the entrance of sin into the world (Genesis 3:16). The subordination of women to men was not part of God's original design. It resulted from the violation of God's creation order.

The use of the word "helper" for the woman reinforces the relation of non-hierarchical complementarity that existed between the man and the woman prior to the fall (Genesis 2:18). In the language of the Old Testament, a "helper" is one who rescues others in situations of need. This designation "helper" is often attributed to God as our rescuer. The word denotes not domesticity or subordination but competency and superior strength (Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:26, 29; Psalm 33:20, 70:5).

They do not believe that the Genesis text of the creation order – Adam first – then Eve – can be understood to assign subordinate status to women. In 1 Corinthians 11, an argument is presented for women to wear a head covering during worship. It is based on the differences in status between men and women that derive from the fact that man was created first (v. 7-10). But, according to the same text, all those considerations have been decisively swept aside "in the Lord," that is, in the Christian community (v.11).

- **Headship, Authority and Leadership.**

Egalitarians challenge the traditional understanding of headship as equating to authority. Affirming that Christ is Lord of the Church and Lord of all, they take the "headship" passages (Eph. 1:22-23; Eph. 4:15-16.; Eph. 5:23.; Col. 1:18.; Col. 2:19.; Eph. 5:25-30.; Col. 2:10; 1:16) and point out that the New Testament defines the headship ministry of Christ to the church as a servant relationship, designed to provide the church with life and growth. This headship is never presented as an authority or lordship position, but headship as life source. The word "head" used figuratively in the English language refers to boss, person in authority, leader. It never has that meaning in New Testament Greek. Of the many references in the New Testament to religious, governmental, civic, familial and military authority figures, not one of them is ever designated as "head." Whenever Christ is described as "head" of the church, his ministry is that of servant-provider. Similarly, as "head" of his wife, a husband is a servant-provider of life, of fullness and growth, not one who exercises authority over her.

- **Biblical Examples Of Women Exercising Authority Over men.**

Egalitarians believe that the few texts which seem to expressly teach women to submit to men and expressly forbid women to exercise spiritual authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-14), are out of sync with the rest of scripture and do not express God's will for all time. Their argument is that if this teaching constituted part of the created order and God's ideal, the Bible would not contain examples of women exercising spiritual authority over men. But it does. Ten examples:

1. Throughout Scripture God incorporated the songs and statements of a number of women in the inspired canon (e.g. Exodus 15:21; Judges 5; Luke 1:46-55, etc). In as much as the Word of God has authority over believers, these passages constitute examples of women having spiritual authority over all who read them.
2. Women were given the command to 'rule' over creation as were men (Gen 1:27-28).

3. God commanded Abraham to obey his wife Sarah (Gen 21.12).
4. Miriam is mentioned as a leader of Israel alongside Moses and Aaron (Micah 6.4). Miriam was also a noted worship leader (Ex 15.20-21).
5. Deborah served as an admirable judge and leader over Israel (Judges 4-5).
6. Huldah was a prophetess consulted by both men and women (2 Kings 22.14). Noadiah and Anna are also depicted as prophetesses who could teach (Nehemiah 6.14; Luke 2.36-38). More generally we read in Acts 2.16-18 that your 'sons and daughters shall prophesy.' Philip's four daughters, not surprisingly, had the gift of prophecy (Acts 2.8-9). Nor is it surprising that Paul allowed women to prophesy in church (1 Corinthians 11.4-5).
7. God used women as the first Christian evangelists, proclaiming the truth that Jesus had been raised from the tomb (John 20.16-18).
8. Both Priscilla (a woman) and Aquila (her husband) taught the man Apollos (Acts 18.26).
9. In Rom 16.1-12, Paul lists a number of women involved in Christian service. Phoebe is called a 'deacon' (vv1-2); Priscilla is given equal status to her husband, Aquila, in their kingdom work (vv3-4); Mary is described as a hard worker among the believers (v6); Andronicus and Junia (a female name) are said to be 'prominent among the apostles' (v7); and Tryphosa and Persis are described as 'workers' in the Lord (v12).
10. Paul refers to Euodia and Syntyche as "co-workers" –as much so as Clement or any man (Phil 4.2-3). Egalitarian scholars point out that Paul uses the term "co-worker" to describe those appointed to positions of authority in local churches. If this is true, then Paul appointed women to leadership positions.

The conclusion is that if it were part of God's creation ideal that women never exercise spiritual authority over men, Scripture would not contain these counter examples. The wealth of examples proves that the prohibition against women serving as spiritual leaders is cultural, not timeless. God's ideal will, however, is expressed in Galatians 3.28 – "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". It seems evident to Egalitarians that restricting roles on the basis of gender is no more justified in the body of Christ than restricting roles on the basis of race or class.

- **Gift Based, Not Gender Based Ministry.**

Importantly, whenever Paul or anyone else discusses ministry in the church, he speaks of gift-based roles, not gender-based roles. The New Testament passages that list gifts do not imply that certain gifts are inextricably connected to a person's gender – including the gifts of pastoring, teaching, and evangelizing (i.e. 1 Corinthians 12.4-31; Eph 4.11). This absence of gender specification is hardly what one would expect if leadership gifts were restricted to men, for the issue of women in leadership was certainly present in New Testament churches (e.g. 1 Corinthians 11.1-16; 1 Tim 2.11-14). Instead, there is the straightforward declaration that 'there are varieties of gifts...varieties of services...varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them *in everyone*' (1 Corinthians 12.4-6). There is no hint that gender has anything to do with the Spirit's gifting of people for service.

Egalitarians believe we are guilty of idolizing fallen culture and quenching the Spirit if we canonize first-century restrictions against women and construe them as part of God's ideal for all time. They see no difference between that, and certain Christians in the past trying to use the Bible's acceptance of slavery as a justification for its ongoing practice.

Wider Evidence

In addition to biblical arguments several wider arguments are given. Here are a few of the more important ones.

Trinity

Like the Complimentarians, the Egalitarians see the nature of the Trinity as the foundational model, but they see it very differently from the Complimentarians. Egalitarians argue that the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity is oneness, equality and mutuality, not hierarchy and authority. The fundamental grammar of Trinitarian theology is that God is one and works as one in will, in power, and in action. Egalitarians reject the concept of subordination in the Trinity to the degree that they see this is a dangerous heresy that borders on Arianism – that Christ was not truly divine, but a created being. To suggest that the scripture teaches an eternal subordination / hierarchical relationship within the Trinity is to abandon a foundational doctrine of the church. Jesus did not subordinate himself to accomplish

redemption because God the Boss ordered him to. He willingly humbled himself and took the form of a servant, without relinquishing any of his divinity. For a fuller explanation see the article in the footnote.⁵

Sociology

Neither reason nor experience supports the notion that women cannot be gifted to exercise the highest levels of spiritual authority. There is no rationally discernable connection between a person's gender and his or her natural ability to preach, teach, or lead others. Experience over the last 150 years has demonstrated that women have been used by God as outstanding preachers, teachers, evangelists, and pastors.

Nature

Despite claims to the contrary by Complimentarians, denying women the capacity to exercise spiritual authority propagates a view of women as essentially inferior to men. A female, by virtue of being female, is deemed to be incapable of carrying out a role of spiritual leadership that men can carry out. This is not functional subordination but subordination rooted in nature.

Eschatological

The final vision for humanity is the new earth and the new Jerusalem, the holy city in which God will be all in all and men and women, without ceasing to be men and women, will commune in perfect harmony with one another. Gifts will no longer be needed as we will not have to teach one another, heal one another or prophesy to one another in heaven for God shall be in our immediate presence. Egalitarians thus argue that this vision of perfected human nature is the ideal to which the church should be striving for now. A perfect harmony of the sexes in which gender, race, or class is irrelevant in Christ's body. Egalitarians see the scriptural definition of the new community in Christ in Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The "Egalitarian View" is best represented by emeritus professor at Wheaton College, Gilbert Bilezikian in his book "Beyond Sex Roles"⁶ and the organisation he founded "Christians For Biblical Equality" www.cbeinternational.org

The Major Disputed Texts In Genesis.

If we follow the Creation - Fall – Redemption model, a key question to ask is "What was the original nature of male / female relations in God's original design of creation?" For if Jesus came to restore what was lost in the Fall, then we need to examine God's original intention. But here is where the two parties differ. Egalitarians see a pattern of mutuality before the fall, reflected in the Trinity. Complimentarians see a hierarchy established by God for all time, also reflected in the Trinity! To try and save space, I have listed the Complimentarian arguments and the Egalitarian rebuttals here;

Disputed Creation Texts.

- **It was the man who was created in the image of God and given dominion.**
"Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness; and let them have dominion..." (Genesis 1:26). In Hebrew the generic term "man" refers to human beings. In Genesis 5:2 the term "man" designates both male and female. Both man and woman bear the image of God. The male does not bear the image of God alone. Femaleness pertains to the image of God as fully as Maleness. ***"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*** (Genesis 1:27) As both the man and the woman bear the image of God, they are both assigned the task of ruling the earth, without any differentiation on the basis of sex. The text gives no hint of a division of responsibilities or of rank in their rulership of the earth.

- **The man was given authority over the woman at creation.**
Genesis 1 is very specific about Gods allocation of spheres of authority. There are boundaries for the water and the earth, to the process of reproduction, to the establishment of the sun and the moon, to the

⁵ "Hermeneutical Bungee Jumping: Subordination In The Godhead" - Gilbert Bilezikian - Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. March 1997.

⁶ "Beyond Sex Roles- What The Bible Says About A Woman's Place In Church And Family" – Gilbert Bilezikian 9th edition 1997 Baker Books 335 pages.

establishment of the ecological chain between humans and plants and between animals and plants. He prescribes in detail human rulership over the fish, the birds, over every living thing. Everything in the universe is carefully organised in a hierarchy of order, yet there is not the slightest indication that such a hierarchy existed between Adam and Eve. As the climax of the creation, this is astonishing that if a hierarchy was what God had intended, it was not mentioned. Nowhere within God's original design is it stated that man was intended to rule over women. Their relationship was one of mutuality in equality. Supremacy of one over the other was alien to God's creation purposes for them.

- **The woman was made to be the man's helper – that's an authority structure.**

"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18)

Complimentarians argue that the word "helper" implies an authority structure, where the man is the boss and the woman was created to support him. In the Old Testament, the term "helper" has the connotation of a "rescuer". It is most often used of God, who is the "helper" of Israel, but there is no implication that because he is the "helper" God is subordinate to Israel. The implication in Genesis 2 is that the man was in need of help, and God provided him with a rescuer.

- **Man was created first, therefore he has supremacy over the woman.**

Genesis 2:21-22 describes the creation of the woman from the man. This raises the primacy argument, that because the man was created before the woman, he has supremacy over the woman. But this is not stated and cannot be inferred from the Genesis text. The animals were created before Adam and Eve, but they do not have supremacy just because they were created first. In the Old Testament primacy was given to the firstborn eldest male in each family. But the Old Testament primacy given to the eldest male is not an argument for male superiority over females. If the supremacy argument were to be applied in this fashion today, then only firstborn males could serve as leaders in the church.

Disputed Texts Concerning The Fall.

In the first two chapters of Genesis there are only two references to human relationships that involve authority. God's sovereignty over humans, spelled out by the prohibition of the tree in the garden. The other authority line is the authority given by God to Adam and Eve to subdue the earth and have dominion over its animals. There is no prescription for a man to exercise authority over a woman. Any teaching that inserts an authority structure between Adam and Eve is not founded on the biblical text.

- **Eve was the one who was tempted and fell. That implies inferiority.**

"For the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil". (Genesis 3:4-5)

It's been argued that Eve was more susceptible as a woman because she was more emotional, impressionable, irrational, temperamental, impulsive, compliant, fragile or passive. If these things were true, what was Adam's excuse for making a bad decision? Eve was vulnerable in that she had not heard the prohibition of the tree directly from God, but through Adam. Shrewdly, the tempter ignored Adam and challenged the less informed Eve, who had not heard directly from God and was less equipped in knowledge at this point to deal with the temptation. Yet a careful reading of the text reveals that Eve put up much more of a fight than Adam did. God did not make her stupid, wicked or inferior to Adam. The temptation was the result of her not having the revelation of God that Adam had experienced prior to her existence.

Adam was made responsible for the introduction of sin and death into the world (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22) while Eve's sin is described only as her being 'deceived' (2 Corinthians 11.3; 1 Timothy 2:14). She was led into error by God's powerful archenemy. Adam was led into error by his wife. Although both sinned, God held Adam responsible for the fall.

- **God questioned Adam first about the fall. That shows that he was responsible for Eve.**

Adam was the one who heard God speak the prohibition, so Adam was the first to be held responsible for his disobedience. But he was not being called upon to answer for them both, or to act as family spokesman or as a priest. Eve would have her own turn before God. Far from acting as Eve's priest, Adam became her accuser.

- **God reinforced his original intention when he said to Eve ‘Your husband will rule over you’.**

Genesis 3:16 *“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing, in pain you will bring forth children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”*. The rulership of Adam over Eve was a consequence of the fall. He hadn’t ruled over her before sin entered the world, but he would now. If Adam had ruled over Eve before the fall, there would have been no need for God to pronounce this sentence upon her. Male rulership was not a part of God’s design for relationships between men and women, but it came as a consequence of the fall. The woman wants a mate, and she gets a master; she wants a lover and she gets a lord; she wants a husband and she gets a hierarchy. As a result of Satan’s work, man was now master over the woman, just as the earth was now master over the man. Both male dominance and death are two elements introduced as a result of sin, both Satanic in origin. Male rulership is no more God’s will than death is God’s will for humans.

The Gospels And Acts.

Male And Female Apostles.

We must not ignore the fact that Jesus chose twelve male apostles. There were all kinds of reasons for this within both the symbolic world in which he was operating, and the practical and cultural world within which they would have to live and work. But we must not also ignore the fact that there comes a time in the story when the disciples all forsake Jesus and run away; and at that point, long before the rehabilitation of Peter and the others, it is the women who come first to the tomb, who are the first to see the risen Jesus, and are the first to be entrusted with the news that he has been raised from the dead.

This is of incalculable significance. If an apostle is a witness to the resurrection, (Acts 1:22) Mary Magdalene and the others deserved that title before any of the men. Paul calls a woman named Junia an apostle in Romans 16.7. (There was a huge fuss in the translation and revision of the New International Version at the suggestion that Junia was a woman, and that not a single historical or exegetical argument was available to those who kept insisting, for obvious reasons, that she was Junias, a man.)

Jesus And Women.

On at least one occasion, and maybe more, Jesus was anointed by a woman. This was a priestly action, which Jesus accepted as such.

In Luke 10 we have the well known story of Mary and Martha. Most of us grew up with the understanding that Martha was the active type and Mary the passive or contemplative type, and that Jesus is simply affirming the importance of both and even the priority of devotion to him. That devotion is undoubtedly part of the importance of the story, but far more obvious to any first-century reader, and to many readers in Turkey, the Middle East and many other parts of the world to this day, would be the fact that Mary was sitting at Jesus’ feet within the male part of the house, rather than being kept in the back rooms with the other women. This is what really bothered Martha. No doubt she was cross at being left to do all the work, but the real problem was that Mary had cut clean across one of the most basic of social conventions. And Jesus declares that she is right to do so. She is ‘sitting at his feet’; a phrase which doesn’t mean what it would mean today, the adoring student gazing up in admiration and love at the wonderful teacher. As is clear from the use of the phrase elsewhere in the New Testament (for instance, Paul with Gamaliel), to sit at the teacher’s feet is a way of saying you are being a student, picking up the teacher’s wisdom and learning; and in that very practical world you wouldn’t do this just for the sake of informing your own mind and heart, but in order to be a teacher, a rabbi, yourself. A first century reader of the Gospels wouldn’t miss that point. We should not then be surprised to find so many women in positions of leadership, initiative and responsibility in the early church. Romans 16 indicates how powerfully the teaching both of Jesus and of Paul was being worked out in practice.

The Increasing Significance Of Women.

At the crucifixion the women were able to come and go and see what was happening without fear from the authorities. They did not expect to be, nor were they, regarded as a threat. But by contrast, in the book of Acts during the persecution of the church in the time of Stephen, women are being targeted equally alongside the men. Saul of Tarsus was going to Damascus to catch women and men alike and haul them off into prison. This only makes sense if the women, too, are seen as leaders, influential figures within the community.

Disputed New Testament Texts.

We cannot deny that there are some New Testament scriptures that seem to prohibit women exercising certain ministries. If we read these prohibitions outside of their cultural context, we miss the whole point of the teaching. Gordon Fee helps us understand just how different the New Testament cultural context is to ours.⁷ For example, the oft-commanded 'Greet one another with a holy kiss' (Rom 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26) came to be a tremendous problem when the oriental custom disappeared. The repercussions were obvious, and it ceased to be practiced.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 – Women Silent In The Churches

²⁶What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. ²⁷If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God.

²⁹Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³²The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵If 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.

³⁶Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored!

³⁹Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

Complimentarians such as Grudem and Piper don't believe Paul was teaching that women should be totally silent in church. They acknowledge that in 1 Corinthians 11:15 he permits them to pray and prophesy. But they understand these scriptures to mean that the way the women were speaking in church was shameful, dishonouring the role of the men as leaders of the congregation. Complimentarians are reluctant to apply this scripture literally, prohibiting women to speak at all. Yet the text "*as in all the congregations of the saints*" allows no exceptions and no contradiction. They see that the principle of male authority is reinforced in this passage.

Note: Commentators on all sides of the argument are mystified as to what "Law" is being referred to here. Egalitarians point out that there is no Old Testament Law that requires women to be in submission. But there was a law in the secular society of the time that required the submission of women.

Egalitarians see this prohibition as being completely out of character with the Epistle, and with Paul himself. Yet the framework for this prohibition is one of encouragement to participate in worship (V31 & 39) The other framework is his desire to have peaceful and orderly worship. Paul was facing a church situation where arrogant members were competing for conspicuous ministries. There are two major interpretations of this passage by Egalitarian scholars, both taking local culture into account.

1. Within the Corinthian church were a group of Jews who were trying to bring back the rules of the synagogue - women not qualified to be learners; husbands presented as their wives' sole source of obtaining information; women to ask questions of their husbands in the home. (no mention is made of what the single women or widows without a husband are to do!) In the synagogue it was regarded as shameful for a woman to speak. Some Egalitarian scholars believe that in this passage, Paul is quoting back one of their own slogans, which the congregation would have instantly recognised. They believe he is quoting the words of the opposition. Such quotes are not easily recognisable today as punctuation and quotation marks were not used in the original

⁷ "The Cultural Context Of Ephesians 5:18 -6:9 – Is there a divinely ordained hierarchy in the church and the home that is based on gender alone?" Gordon D Fee - Priscilla Papers 2002 16:2. Fee is Professor of New Testament at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada.

language.⁸ So the Egalitarians see this scripture in a cultural context where a “power play” is going on.

2. Other egalitarian scholars have pointed out that the culture of the day required men and women to sit apart. Women, being largely uneducated, would be tempted to call out to their husbands, or to talk amongst themselves, when they didn’t understand what was being taught, therefore becoming a disruptive influence in what was supposed to be an orderly worship service. Hence the injunction to keep silent and ask their husbands at home.

1 Corinthians 11.2-10 – The “Headship Debate”

²I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings,^[a] just as I passed them on to you.

³Now 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. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. ⁵And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. ⁶If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. ⁷A man ought not to cover his head,^[b] since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

Both Complimentarians and Egalitarians accept that Paul’s primary concern is propriety in worship. The particular cultural issues in that day were hair length and head coverings, which are not cultural issues in our day. But he might write a similar letter to our churches if men or women were dressing in clothing that revealed too much skin, so that the mode of dress became distracting to others who were worshipping, or worse still, sent provocative sexual messages. But the point of contention in this passage is not about the cultural situation to which Paul was writing, but by what the word “head” means when it is applied in a figurative sense. The “headship” debate has been covered earlier on in this paper, so I won’t repeat it here in depth.

Complimentarians see this passage as a reinforcement of the timeless principle of male headship (authority) and female subordination, at least amongst husband and wife, and that appearance or demeanour during worship should in no way send the wrong cultural signals that one is unfaithful - either to God or to one’s spouse. They read verse 7 as an expression of hierarchy. Woman is the glory of man because of the creation order and purpose. Verses 8 and 9 are interpreted in the light of a creation order that gives authority to the male.

Egalitarians point out that while “head” might refer to chief, boss, authority, ruler in the English language, in ancient Greek as in many other languages, it doesn’t carry that meaning. They argue that the biblical meaning of “head” carries the idea of derivation, origin, starting point and nurture. The concept is one of fountainhead, or life source. Thus in the perspective of creation, Christ is the fountainhead of man’s life, and that the man is the fountainhead of woman’s life. From the perspective of incarnation, God is the fountainhead of Christ’s life. To interpret “head” in this passage as ruler or authority changes the whole meaning of the passage – God is Christ’s ruler, Christ is man’s ruler, man is woman’s ruler. So the egalitarians understand the “headship” relationship as referring to “source of being”.

1 Tim 2:8-15 – Women Not Allowed To Teach Or Have Authority Over A Man

⁸I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

⁹I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴And Adam

⁸ For a fuller explanation see “Beyond Sex Roles” by Gilbert Bilezikian pp144-153

was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

The Complimentarian View.

For Complimentarians, this passage more than any other has been the sheet-anchor for the belief that the church should be led by an eldership of spiritual men. Some Complimentarians take the text at face value, and do not allow women to teach at all, or to have any authority over men. Others say it's not an absolute prohibition on women teaching, for Paul instructs Titus that the older women should instruct the younger women (Titus 2:3-4) and recognizes the teaching that Eunice and Lois gave their son and grandson (2 Timothy 1:5). They recognize that teaching and learning are such broad terms that it is impossible that women not teach men and men not learn from women. This Complimentarian view is that "teaching that is inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership"⁹ Complimentarians see that the admonitions in this passage about braided hair, jewelry and expensive clothes are culturally conditioned, but the admonition about women teaching is not, and is an absolute and universal principle stated with Apostolic authority that applies to all churches for all time. For this reason, they do not believe that God genuinely calls women to be Pastors.

The Egalitarian View.

Egalitarian scholars point out some of the many problems with this passage;

1. Paul does not use the common, time honoured Greek word for "authority". He uses a verb not used anywhere else in the New Testament which could mean "authority" or it could mean "usurpation".
2. If taken at face value, this passage is discordant with Paul's teaching on the church being a community where distinctions of race, class, rank and sex were declared to be irrelevant. It is also discordant with his teaching on mutual submission.
3. References to the teaching ministry of the church are found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4, but in none of these passages is there anything resembling an exclusion of women, even though it is clear women participated in ministries. The gifts of the Spirit, including teaching, are never differentiated on the basis of sex in the New Testament. If this was a foundational teaching of Paul, why does it not appear elsewhere?
4. The word for "teach" used here, is the same word used in Colossians 3:16, where there is emphasis on mutual compassion and kindness, mutual forgiveness, mutual love, mutual admonishment and mutual teaching. There is no hint of a gender distinction in Colossians 3:16.
5. In every catalogue of gifts in Paul's writings – Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 - the ministry of teaching is ranked lower than the ministry of prophecy. Yet women were allowed to prophesy. Apostles and prophets provide the foundation on which the church is built. So if women were allowed to prophesy, why this limitation on them teaching?
6. At face value, this same passage contains teaching that women find salvation through having babies. Yet every evangelical would hold that salvation is obtained by grace through faith. Why are some so emphatic about taking one section of this passage literally, when they clearly don't treat the rest of the passage in the same way? We need to be very careful of using a text as a pretext away from its context.

Some explanations.

1. Women are recognised in this passage as being learners. Their learning should be in a attitude of quietness and submission. The passage does not say they should be in submission to men. Their submission could well refer to God or the Gospel. The context suggests that Paul's concern was that these women focus on learning during these sessions, rather than struggling to assert themselves as teachers. They first had to earn their credentials as disciples.
2. At the fall it was Eve who was the less informed of the two. She was the late comer on the scene and was less well equipped to deal with the temptation. She should have deferred to Adam who had received the command directly from God. Adam had been the teacher of God's word to Eve, and Eve had been the learner. Yet when tempted, Eve acted as teacher. She exercised an authoritative function that she had not been prepared for. Likewise in Ephesus there were

⁹ Overview of central concerns- questions and answers – Question 21 - John Piper and Wayne Grudem – Restoring Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

ignorant but assertive women who were creating trouble in the church through their exuberance. Paul's solution is to restrict them from teaching while they are still learners, and restricts them from trying to teach their male teachers. Greek scholars have pointed out that Paul uses the present tense "I do not permit..." which in the Greek has the force of "I do not permit *now* a woman to teach..."

3. Egalitarians see this prohibition as a universal principle where Paul is protecting the churches from incompetent people teaching or exercising authority. Neither men nor women should be appointed to positions of leadership until they show evidence of maturity and competency.
4. The prohibition needs to be seen in the light of what the New Testament reveals about the church in Ephesus. We know that women had prominent leadership roles in a religious cult that permeated Ephesus. The centre of this cult was the temple of Diana, an enormous structure that was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Part of the religious function of some of these female spiritual leaders was to engage in ritualistic prostitution. In this context, having newly converted pagan women in leadership positions would have been unwise and would have formed a barrier to the furthering of the gospel. The church in Ephesus was in a crisis created by a massive influx of false teaching and intrusions by cults. Paul was concerned with the doctrinal survival of the church in Ephesus, and Timothy was the major factor in that survival. The core of Paul's strategy was to eliminate all unqualified and deviant teachers, both male and female, so that the only teaching in the church would be by a small band of "faithful people". Egalitarians see this restriction on women teaching as a temporary measure to get the church through a time of crisis.
5. What explanation can be given for the passages in Paul where creation, Adam and Eve, are referred to in order to explain the restriction passages (1 Tim 2.14)? On the surface this is puzzling. What difference does it make that Adam came before Eve? Wouldn't this same logic require that the animals have authority over humans, since they were created before us? And wasn't Adam deceived just as much as the woman? Indeed, doesn't Paul elsewhere place the onus of responsibility for the deception on Adam (Rom 5.12, 17-19)? The puzzle is removed when Paul's instruction is seen in the light of a common rabbinic understanding of what happened in the Garden. According to this tradition, Adam was at fault for not properly instructing Eve about the dangers and consequences of eating from the forbidden tree. Adam had been created first and had received instruction directly from God. Eve had been created second and was dependent on Adam for this information. This is why she was more vulnerable and also why Adam bore the brunt of responsibility for the fall. If read in this light, Paul's instruction to Timothy begins to make sense. Paul is appealing to this rabbinic understanding as a rationale for telling Timothy not to allow women in his church to teach. They are in the same position as Eve was and are therefore vulnerable (c.f. 1 Tim 5.11-15). This warning would have no application in cultural contexts in which women are afforded as much opportunity to learn as men are and in which there are no negative religious connotations associated with women in leadership.

It is worth noting the difference between teaching then and now. At the time before the New Testament was written, teachers were the dispensers of Christian truth. There was no written canon of truth to refer to, so the authority of the teacher was absolute. With the formation of the New Testament canon, the authority shifted from the individual teacher to the authority of the New Testament scriptures. As a result, a current day teacher of Christian truth has no authority of themselves. The authority rests in the Word of God. Today the teacher shares the truth contained in God's word, but scripture is the only authority for the church.

I Timothy 3:1- 13 – Qualifications For Elders And Deacons

¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer,^[a] he desires a noble task. ²Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.

¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

¹¹In the same way, their wives^[b] are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.

¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

The Complimentarian View

The major point made from this passage is that in setting out qualifications for both Elders and Deacons, Paul states that they are to be “the husband of one wife.” Women cannot fulfil this qualification.

The Egalitarian View

Egalitarians point out that if this qualification is taken literally, then only those who are male and married may serve as Elders and Deacons. This rules out single men, the divorced and those whose wives have died. In fact, how does this equate to Paul’s expressed desire for believers committed to ministry to be single and celibate? (1 Corinthians 7: 32 -35) Paul laid down particular conditions for the Ephesian church under Timothy’s leadership because of the crisis it was in. If marriage was a universal requirement for all churches for all time, then Jesus himself would have been disqualified from leadership, as would Paul and Barnabas.

In an age when married men outside the Christian church were often known to have more than one sexual partner, it seems reasonable to understand Paul’s injunction as a call to faithful commitment to one marriage partner, which is in line with the rest of the character qualities he enumerates.

Conclusion.

As I pointed out earlier in this paper, there are different shades of viewpoint on this issue. Unfortunately extremists at both ends of the spectrum vilify each other and try to portray complex issues in black and white terms. We need to remind ourselves that there are Godly scholarly minds on both sides of this debate who genuinely grapple with questions of church polity while still staying true to scripture.

Some may well argue that the best thing to do is to leave well alone. After all, has the church not accepted male leadership for most of its 2000 year history? Yes it has. But for those who see that scripture not only allows, but encourages women to take leadership roles in a church, an injustice is being done which for them is a violation of the scripture.

I began this paper with a question which I believe is fundamental to this whole issue. ***“Does the Bible teach an abiding principle which places limits on women in church leadership, or not?”***

Having read copious material on both sides of this issue over the last 20 years, I have come to the personal conclusion that the Bible does not teach an abiding principle placing limits on women in church leadership. To those who have not yet made up their minds, and to those who have already made up their minds, I would respectfully request that they also research the arguments on **both** sides of the issue, with an open Bible and an open mind, before coming to a conclusion.

David McChesney
Westlake Church 21.12.2009.