

Examining the Twelve Biblical Pillars of Male Hierarchy

PHILIP B. PAYNE

Does it really matter what the Bible says about man and woman? Jesus repeatedly affirmed the Scriptures to be God's word. Paul affirms that all Scripture is God-breathed. The Bible is God's perfectly holy word and has final authority on all matters, including man and woman.

So when some argue that the Bible opposes the equal standing of man and woman in the church and home, they are taking the issue to the final court of appeals, as they should. Twelve seemingly strong biblical pillars support their argument:

1. Male headship.
2. "Wives, submit to your husbands."
3. Women may not teach.
4. Man's priority in the creation order.
5. Woman is man's helper.
6. God decreed, "he will rule over you."
7. In the Old Testament, only males exemplify leadership.
8. Only males were priests.
9. Only males were apostles.
10. Only males were overseers, pastors, or elders.
11. Women should not speak in church.
12. Men and women have separate roles in the church.

Does this not mean that the Bible, and therefore God, is overwhelmingly in favor of male hierarchy? I first heard the claim that the Bible does not limit the ministry of women as a beginning PhD student at Cambridge University. I almost stood up in the middle of the lecture to yell, "That's not true," but instead determined to disprove it. This essay distills thirty-nine years of research about these twelve pillars and highlights some crucial evidence that the biblical passages to which they appeal do not warrant male hierarchy.¹ I discovered that the very Scriptures I thought supported hierarchy actually promote equality.

Pillar 1: The Bible teaches "male headship."

"Male headship" means that only males should be leaders in the church and in the home. It is based on statements in the Bible that "man is the head of woman" and "the husband is the head of his wife." These English translations seem to imply "head" as authority over, but their contexts explain that they mean, respectively, "the man Adam is the source of woman" and "a husband is a source of love and nourishment for his wife." In



PHILIP BARTON PAYNE is well known for his studies of New Testament textual criticism, the parables of Jesus, and man and woman in Paul's letters. He has taught New Testament in Cambridge University colleges, at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Bethel Seminary, and Fuller Seminary Northwest.

Paul's day, the Greek word for "head," *kephalē*, was not commonly associated with leadership as it is in English. The most exhaustive Greek dictionary (LSJ) lists forty-eight translations of *kephalē* as a metaphor, but none mean leader or authority or anything similar. Nearly all dictionaries covering native Greek usage up to New Testament times do not give even one example of *kephalē* that means authority.² "Source," however, is a standard meaning of *kephalē*. The point of Paul's head-body metaphors with Christ the head of the body, the church, is not the authority of Christ (though Christ does have authority), but that Christ is the source of life and nourishment for the church.³ For instance, Colossians 1:18, "he is the *kephalē* [head] of the body, the church, who is the *archē* ["origin" NEB or "the source of the body's life" TEV]; Colossians 2:19, "the *kephalē* [head], from whom the whole body . . . grows." The standard Greek New Testament dictionary BDAG 296–97 states that *kephalē* can denote: "origin, cause, motive, reason . . . source from which something flows or comes; Ephesians 4:15–16, "the Head, that is, Christ, from whom the whole body . . . grows."

The Greek Old Testament shows that most of its translators did not regard *kephalē* as an appropriate word to convey "leader." When referring to a physical head, they almost always chose *kephalē*, but they hardly ever chose it when the Hebrew word for "head" meant "leader." In 171 such instances, the standard Greek translation (LXX) translates "head" *kephalē* clearly meaning "leader" only six times.⁴

Paul never teaches male headship, but he clearly teaches, again and again, leadership in the church and in the home by women. He repeatedly affirms women in his lists of church leaders. Seven of the ten people Paul names as colleagues in ministry in Romans 16 are women: Phoebe, "deacon of the church of Cenchrea" (16:1) and "leader⁵ of many, including myself" (16:2); Junia, "outstanding among the apostles"⁶ (16:7); Prisca, "my fellow worker in Christ Jesus" (16:3), and Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis "worked hard in the Lord" (16:6, 12). Paul lists many names, but he affirms only a few as working hard in gospel ministry, and most of them are women. He names the wives of Aquila and Andronicus, two of the three men identified in ministry in this same list, highlighting their shared authority. Although Luke and Paul follow Greek custom in listing Aquila's name first when they introduce this couple, both list Prisca first in every passage about their ministry. I know of no parallel to Paul's naming so many women leaders in an open society in the entire history of ancient Greek literature. In spite of his male-centered culture, Paul repeatedly affirms women in church leadership.

Pillar 2: Ephesians 5 teaches, "Wives submit to your husbands."

Grammatically, the wife's submission is explicitly one facet of mutual submission. It refers to voluntary yielding in love (5:21–

22). Paul calls both wives and husbands to defer to and nurture one another. Christ is the model for all believers (4:13, 32–5:2), even as “head” (4:15), which 4:16 explains as the source of the body’s growth. Paul defines what he means by “head” in 5:23 similarly by equating it with “savior” through emphatic apposition: “Christ head of the church, he savior of the body.” What does Christ do as “savior”? Paul explains: “Christ *gives himself*” for the church (5:25, emphasis added) and “nourishes and cherishes” it (5:29). Paul also treats husbands and wives equally in relation to their children (6:1–2; Col 3:20) and tells wives to “rule their homes,” literally “be house despots” (1 Tim 5:14). If this is not leadership in the home, what is?

Paul’s most detailed treatment of marriage, 1 Corinthians 7, specifies exactly the same conditions, opportunities, rights, and obligations for wives and husbands regarding twelve distinct issues about marriage, both physical and spiritual (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 10–11, 12–13, 14, 15, 16, 28, 32 and 34b, and 33–34a and 34c). In each, he addresses men and women as equals. His wording is symmetrically balanced to reinforce this equality. Paul affirms that husband and wife mutually possess each other (v. 2). They have mutual conjugal rights (3), authority over the other’s body (4), and sexual obligations (5). He tells both not to divorce (10–13). Both set apart the other and their children with the spiritual privilege of experiencing the gospel lived out (14). Both have freedom to remarry if deserted (15). Both have a potentially saving influence on the other (16). Paul even writes (7:4), “the husband does not have authority over his own body, but his wife does.” Richard Hays correctly observes how revolutionary this was: “Paul offers a paradigm-shattering vision of marriage as a relationship in which the partners are bonded together in submission to one another.”⁷

Pillar 3: 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men.

The people who came up with this translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 did not do their homework! This verse simply prohibits women in the church in Ephesus from seizing authority to teach men. It does not prohibit women from teaching men as long as they have recognized teaching authority, like Priscilla did. The old NIV misleadingly reads, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” This translation is doubtful for four reasons.

First, the key Greek verb here, *authentēin*, is best translated “to assume authority.” The first documented occurrence of *authentēin* clearly meaning “exercise authority” is three centuries after Paul wrote 1 Timothy.⁸ Every other reference to “authority” in the New Testament is based on a different word, *exousia*. In Paul’s day *authentēin* could mean either “to dominate” or, more commonly, “to assume authority.” Every time it means “assume authority,” the authority is seized, not rightfully held. The King James translation, “to usurp authority,” reflects this understanding. The standard New Testament Greek Dictionary, BDAG, defines it “to assume a stance of independent authority.” The NIV 2011 correctly translates it, “to assume authority.”

Second, Paul typically uses the conjunction in this verse, *oude*, to join two elements to convey a single idea.⁹ In this case, *oude* joins “to teach” and “to assume authority.” Consequently, Paul does not prohibit two things: teaching and seizing authority over men. He prohibits one thing: women seizing authority to teach men. Similarly, Paul prohibited false teachers from unauthorized teaching (1:3).

Third, the translation “I do not permit” is doubtful because the verb Paul chose normally refers to something limited in time, not permanent. Furthermore, its grammatical form is rarely used for a permanent prohibition, but usually focuses on a presently ongoing permission or prohibition, so is best translated, “I am not permitting.”

Fourth, if this verse is a permanent prohibition of women teaching or having authority over a man, it contradicts the Bible’s affirmations of women teaching. Paul encouraged women to teach in church. 1 Corinthians 14:26 states, “whenever you come together, each one”—which includes men and women—“has a . . . teaching (*didakē*). . . .” Likewise, Colossians 3:16 encourages all believers (cf. v. 11), “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.” Paul commands older women in Titus 2:3 to “be teachers of what is excellent.”¹⁰

Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) was the first Christian exposition of Scripture. Both Phoebe and Priscilla taught adult men. Since Phoebe delivered Romans as Paul’s emissary (16:1), she naturally answered the Romans’ questions about it. Priscilla and Aquila explained to Apollos “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). She did this in the very city this prohibition addresses, and she was probably there when Paul wrote 1 Timothy (2 Tim 4:19).

God revealed through women even key portions of inspired Scripture, such as Exodus 15:21; Judges 5:2–31; 1 Samuel 2:1–10; 25:24–31; and Luke 1:25, 42–45, 46–55. Each teaches divine truth.

These and many other passages that approve women teaching (see note 10) demonstrate the error of interpreting 1 Timothy 2:12 as a permanent prohibition against women teaching.

Pillar 4: The “Creation Order” establishes man’s priority over woman.

Nothing in Genesis teaches that creation order establishes man’s priority over woman. God created the plants and animals before man, yet to whom did God give dominion? Was it not the one created later? In fact, the leadership of the one born later is a major Old Testament theme: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah over his older brothers, Moses over Aaron, David over his brothers, and so on.

The Genesis account of creation teaches not hierarchy, but that both man and woman together have dominion over the earth. God created man and woman equally in his image. This equality is not limited to spiritual standing before God, but includes shared authority over the earth. Contrary to the male-oriented custom in Moses’ day, 2:24 calls the man, not his wife, to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.

The creation account does not grant man priority in status or authority over woman, but emphasizes their equality throughout.¹¹

Pillar 5: God calls woman man's "helper" in Genesis 2:18, so women must be subordinate to men.

The narrative structure of Genesis 2 climaxes in the creation of woman, highlighting man's need for a partner corresponding to him. God says, "I will make a strength corresponding to him" in Genesis 2:18. The first word of this expression, sometimes translated "helper" (NIV 2011), means "strength, help, savior, or rescuer." It uses a word that in Scripture nowhere else refers to an inferior, but always to a superior or equal. Sixteen times it describes God as the helper, the rescuer of people in need, their strength or power; the remaining three times (Isa 30:5; Dan 11:34; Hos 13:9) it describes a military protector. It never implies subordination or submission to the one rescued. It means literally, "a strength as in front of him," namely, "a strength corresponding to him."

Pillar 6: Man ought to rule over woman since God decreed, "He will rule over you," in Genesis 3:16.

This is God's statement of what will result from the fall, not God's decree of what should be. Like every other result of the fall, this is something new, not in the original creation. It is a distortion of God's design. Even leading advocates of male hierarchy agree that this "is not a prescription of what should be."¹² They fail to acknowledge, however, that the word for "rule" here does not imply bad rule. Both major Hebrew Lexicons (*HALOT* 2:647–48 and *BDB* 605) analyze every Old Testament instance of this word and list no negative meaning for it. This word is even used for God's rule.

Since man's ruling over woman—even good rule—is a result of the fall, man must not have ruled over woman before the fall. Furthermore, Christ, the promised seed of the woman, has overcome the fall (Gen 3:15; 1 Cor 15:45). New creatures freed by Christ should not foster any of the tragic consequences the fall introduced, including man's rule over woman.

Pillar 7: The Old Testament pattern of male leadership shows that God approves only male leaders.

To claim that God approves only male leaders in the Old Testament is simply false. Even after the fall, the Old Testament describes many women in leadership with God's blessing. It never states that being female should disqualify them. God sent the prophetess Miriam "to lead" Israel (Mic 6:4). Deborah is one of the judges whom "the LORD raised up" and who "saved Israel from the hands of their enemies" (Jdg 2:16, 18; 4:10, 14, 24; 5:1–31). She was a prophetess and the highest leader in all Israel in her day (4:4–5). She, a wife and mother (5:7), had authority to command Israel's military commander, Barak, "Go!" (4:6, 14) and he went. They worked together well with shared authority, he as military commander, she as commander in chief.

Queen Esther had sufficient influence to save her people from imminent genocide and to bring about the destruction of the house of Haman along with 75,000 enemies of the Jews. She, along with Mordecai, "wrote with full authority," and "Esther's decree

confirmed these regulations" (Est 9:29–32). The Bible praises the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–13; 2 Chron 9:1–12) and the Queen of Chaldea (Dan 5:10–12). Although queens Jezebel and Athaliah were wicked (1 Kings 18:4), as were most of Israel's kings, the Bible does not criticize them or any other woman on the grounds that women should not have authority over men.

Priests consulted the prophetess Huldah on finding the lost book of the Law. Men in spiritual leadership over Israel sought instruction from her. The king, the elders, the prophets, and the people accepted her word as divinely revealed (2 Kings 22:14–23:3; 2 Chron 34:22–32). Their obedience to her sparked what is probably the greatest revival in the history of Israel (2 Kings 22:14–23:25; 2 Chron 34:29–35:19).

More generally, the Old Testament expresses hope that all people, women and men, should take spiritual leadership as prophets. Moses said, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (Num 11:29). Joel predicted a greater prophetic role for women: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28–29; fulfilled at Pentecost, Acts 2:14–21).

Never does the Bible state that women leaders are exceptions to a scriptural principle. Quite the opposite of excluding women from leadership over men, the Old Testament describes God appointing women to both secular and sacred leadership.

Pillar 8: In the Old Testament, God approves only male priests.

The only significant social or religious position the Old Testament does not record women holding is that of priest. The most obvious reason for this is the association of priestesses in pagan religions with prostitution, which Deuteronomy 23:17 prohibits. God repeatedly forbade Israel from giving an appearance of following the immoral practices of the surrounding nations. Yet God commanded Moses to call all the children of Israel to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). Isaiah 61:6 predicts a future when all God's people "will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God."

Pillar 9: There were no women apostles, so there should be no women in church leadership.

The assumption that a lack of women apostles excludes women from church leadership is a non sequitur. It is equally true that Jesus didn't appoint any Gentile or slave as a member of the twelve. Does that mean Gentiles and slaves should be excluded from church leadership? Jesus' appointment of twelve Jewish men paralleled the twelve sons of Israel and reinforced the symbolism of the church as the "new Israel." It was not aimed against women in church leadership.

Jesus must not have wanted only male disciples because he encouraged women as disciples.¹³ When Mary "sat at the

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Lord's feet listening," the posture and position of a disciple, Jesus affirms her, "Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:38-42). Furthermore, Jesus did not limit the proclamation of the gospel to men. Mary Magdalene was the first person the resurrected Christ sought out and commissioned to announce the gospel of his resurrection and coming ascension to God the Father (John 20:14-18). Christ appointed her an apostle to the apostles:

Go instead to my brothers and tell them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: 'I have seen the Lord!' And she told them that he had said these things to her" (NIV 2011).

Furthermore, Paul identifies Junia as "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom 16:7). This group included James (Gal 1:19) and Paul, who were both more influential than any of the twelve. Jesus' choice of the twelve in no way excludes women from leadership in the church.

Pillar 10: Women must not be elders, overseers, or pastors of local churches, because the Bible only identifies men, never women, in these offices.

This entire assertion is logically vacuous. Apart from Christ (Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4), the New Testament does not name anyone, man or woman, as an overseer (*episkopos*) or pastor (*poimēn*). The Bible does give John (2 John 1 and 3 John 1) and Peter (2 Pet 5:1) special titles containing the word "elder," but they refer to their special status as apostolic eyewitnesses. They do not identify them as having a local church office.

The only New Testament person named with an explicit title of local church leadership is not a man at all, but a woman: "Phoebe deacon of the church in Cenchrea" (Rom 16:1). The same title was used for a pagan religious office and could apply to women, e.g. *CIG* II: 3037. This is not the Greek word for deaconess, *diakonissa*, and in context definitely does not mean "maid."¹⁴ Cranfield argues it is "virtually certain that Phoebe is being described as 'a (or possibly "the") deacon' of the church."¹⁵ Calvin says she had "a public office in the Church."¹⁶

It makes no sense to exclude women from local church offices like pastor just because a woman was not given that title in the New Testament. After all, the only named person in the New Testament to be given any explicit local church title was Phoebe, a woman.

Paul encourages all believers to desire the office of overseer by stating in 1 Timothy 3:1, "Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task" (NIV 2011). The subject of both Paul's lists of qualifications for overseers and elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is "anyone." There is not a single masculine pronoun or any other limitation to men in either list, contrary to most English translations. Both the Common English Bible and the Contemporary English Version translate these passages faithfully, without introducing any masculine pronouns.

Some think that "one woman man" in 1 Timothy 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6 excludes women, but even prominent complementarians Doug Moo and Thomas Schreiner acknowledge this phrase does not exclude women.¹⁷ It is a requirement that overseers be "monogamous," whether men or women. As Hugenberger has shown,¹⁸ and Jesus' interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 in Mark 10:12 confirms, it is common throughout the Bible for prohibitions addressing men also to apply to women. For example, "Do not covet your neighbor's wife" implicitly also prohibits coveting your neighbor's husband.

Paul's point is not that all overseers must be married. Paul, after all, encourages single believers not to marry but to be devoted to the Lord in 1 Corinthians 7:27-28, 32-35. Furthermore, to demand that overseers be married would exclude Jesus, Paul (1 Cor 7:7), and virtually all Catholic priests as well as monastics, both male and female.

Since "one woman man" is an idiomatic phrase for a monogamous relationship, any claim that a single word of it ("man") also functions separately as a universal requirement must posit a double meaning. The context does not warrant this. It is bad hermeneutics to isolate a single word ("man") from an idiomatic phrase ("one woman man") and elevate that single word to the status of a separate universal requirement. It is like taking "household" out of "ruling children and their own households well" and insisting that only slave owners can be overseers.

Furthermore, since Phoebe was a deacon (Rom 16:2) and the qualifications for women are included under deacons (1 Tim 3:11), "one woman man" in the very next verse of this section must not exclude women. Consequently, this idiomatic phrase must not exclude women in 1 Timothy 3:2 or Titus 1:6, either.

Pillar 11: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 commands three times, "Let women be silent in the churches."

It is true these verses three times explicitly prohibit women from speaking in church. They even prohibit a respected woman, a wife, from asking questions in church out of a desire to learn. These verses have puzzled virtually everyone who has studied them, including early church fathers, because their plain meaning contradicts statements throughout this chapter that "all" may teach and prophesy (5, 24, 26, 31, 39) and the affirmation of women prophesying in 11:5-6. In addition, everywhere else Paul cites "the law" he quotes Scripture, but "the law" (14:34) never commands women to be in submission or to be silent in religious gatherings. In fact, Psalm 68:11 (12 MT) states, "The Lord announced the word; the women proclaiming it are a great company." Isaiah 40:9 states, "O woman, . . . say, 'Here is your God!'"

Scholars who assume Paul is expressing a command in these verses have proposed an enormous number of interpretations to limit its demand for silence, such as restricting only the judging of prophecies or only disruptive chatter, each contrary to its plain meaning in Greek and most English translations. These interpretations *permit* the type of speech specifically *prohibited* in verse 35!

The key to understanding these verses is evident in the earliest manuscripts of them. The fundamental question in determining the original text of Scripture is known as Bengel's first principle. It states, "The text that best explains the emergence of all other texts is most likely original." These verses follow verse 40 in Western text-type manuscripts, but in other manuscripts they follow verse 33. There are only three reasonable possibilities for their original location: after v. 33, after v. 40, or in the margin. Did New Testament scribes in copying manuscripts move large blocks of text this far without an obvious reason? No, they did not. In fact, there is not a single manuscript of any passage of comparable length in any of Paul's letters that has been moved this far without an obvious reason. It would have been totally out of character and convention for a scribe to move these verses from after verse 33 to after verse 40 or vice versa.

It was scribal custom, however, to write omitted text in the margin and for scribes to copy text they found in the margin into the body text where they thought it fit best. Similarly, any secretary retyping an edited letter will move marginal notes into the body of the letter. Transcriptional probability, therefore, argues that someone first wrote, "Let women be silent in the churches. . . ." in the margin of a manuscript, and later copyists inserted it either after v. 33 or after v. 40. After all, common sense demands that something customary is more likely to occur than something so extraordinary that no other instance is known.

As marginal text, its meaning is not constrained by its context. Consequently, its purpose is harder to determine. Specifically, one cannot know if this text in the margin is something Paul affirms or denies. Perhaps it identifies the false prophecy Paul had in mind in his adjacent reference to "one who thinks he is a prophet." It is doubtful Paul himself penned 14:34–35, since a typical margin would not have room for this much text in his large handwriting (Gal 6:11; 2 Thess 3:17). One can only conjecture who wrote it in the margin, why, and when. Therefore, this command that women be silent in church should not be used to establish theology or church practice.

Some may become alarmed at this prospect of "taking verses out of the Bible," thinking this may undermine faith in the inerrancy of the original autographs. However, this concern is unfounded. This is a unique case, the only passage in Paul's letters where such a large block of text occurs in locations so far away with no adequate explanation if it was originally in the body text. Its origin as marginal text is the only natural explanation of the manuscript evidence. Consequently, this key reason to regard it as marginal text does not support the marginal status, much less exclusion, of any other passage of Scripture.

Most Bible-believing scholars, including Don Carson and Dan Wallace,¹⁹ believe the narrative of the woman taken in adultery was not originally in the text. Carson writes, "those [manuscripts] that do include it [John 7:53–8:11] display a rather high frequency of textual variants. . . . The diversity of placement confirms the inauthenticity of the verses."²⁰ The command

that women be silent in church, in addition to sharing these features is also like the narrative of the adulteress since it contains word usage atypical of the book's author, disrupts the narrative or topic of the passage, and has marginal symbols or notes indicating scribal awareness of a textual problem. In both cases, the most important New Testament manuscript, *Codex Vaticanus*, has a symbol of a textual variant at the exact point both these passages begin.

Furthermore, the passage silencing women has many more evidences that it was added later than even the narrative of the adulteress:

- It makes alien use of vocabulary from this chapter.
- It conflicts with the goal of instruction in church.
- "Just as the law says" does not fit Paul's theology or style, nor is there any such law in the Old Testament.
- It subordinates a weak social group that Paul champions.
- Its vocabulary mimics that of the later 1 Timothy 2:11–15.
- In 1 Corinthians only these verses are directed to people "in the churches."
- And it fits an obvious motive for this addition, to silence women.

The conflicts between the content of these verses and Paul's teachings indicate that if Paul had them put in the margin, he probably did so to identify what false prophecy he had in mind in his adjacent rebuke of "one who thinks he is a prophet" (v. 37).

Most scholars who have published an analysis of the manuscript data, however, like Gordon Fee, have concluded that these verses were not in Paul's original letter or its margin. *Man and Woman, One in Christ* identifies seven evidences from actual manuscripts plus nine internal features of the text that support understanding this passage as a later addition.²¹ If 14:34–35 is a later addition, not in the original text, it does not have apostolic authority. If it quotes a false prophecy, that false prophecy does not have authority. Overwhelming evidence that it was first written in the margin means this command that women be silent in church should not be used to establish theology or church practice.

Pillar 12: Men and women have separate roles in the church.

Not only are roles taught nowhere in Scripture, Paul explicitly expresses the equal standing of male and female in Christ. First Corinthians 11:11 states, "However, neither is woman separate from man, nor is man separate from woman in the Lord." Standard Greek dictionaries do not support the translation "independent." Paul states that woman and man are "not separate" in the context of affirming that women, like men, may pray and prophesy, leading worship in church. Therefore, Paul's denial that women are separate from men "in the Lord" must apply to women in church leadership. Paul introduces 11:11 with the word "however," which, in Greek, highlights his point of central concern.²² Paul is stating a fundamental principle of public worship: there is no gender-based separation in church leadership.

Galatians 2–3 also explicitly affirms this fundamental principle. When Peter withdrew from table fellowship with Gentiles in Galatia, Paul “opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned . . . [of] hypocrisy . . . [and] not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:11–14 NIV). In defending his denunciation of Peter’s unequal treatment, Paul asserts the principle of the equal standing of Jew and Gentile in Christ and expands it to include slave and free and male and female in Galatians 3:28. Therefore, this verse in context teaches that any exclusion of Gentiles, slaves, or women as a class from full participation in church is contrary to the gospel. Galatians 3:28 is not limited to who can be saved. As the forty-two theological, historical, cultural, contextual, and exegetical reasons identified in the following article demand, it is a call to radically new social interaction based on equality in the body of Christ, the church. In Christ there is no male-female division. Excluding women from leadership roles in church is precisely such a male-female division that Galatians 3:28 denounces.

Peter clearly repented of his hypocrisy and action contrary to the gospel, because he praises “all Paul’s letters,” which always include Galatians, as Scripture (2 Pet 3:15–16). Those who say they affirm the equality of men and women yet restrict the roles of women in church leadership should follow Peter’s example and repent. They should acknowledge with Paul that making such a male-female division in the church is contrary to the gospel.

Conclusion

Concerning the twelve pillars examined above, the Bible teaches the following:

1. Men and women should share leadership. Leadership is not exclusively male.
2. Men and women should “submit to one another” in the church and in marriage.
3. Women may teach in church.
4. Men and women share dominion in creation.
5. Woman is a “strength corresponding to” man, not his subordinate.
6. Male rule is a result of the fall.
7. The Old Testament approves women in leadership.
8. The biblical ideal is that all believers should be priests and should prophesy.
9. There were women leaders in the apostolic church.
10. The Bible does not exclude women from local church offices. In fact, the only person the Bible explicitly names with the title of a local church office is Phoebe.
11. The Bible encourages women to speak, even prophesy, in church.
12. The Bible teaches that the exclusion of women from leadership roles is contrary to the gospel.

A close examination of these twelve alleged biblical pillars for male hierarchy reveals that the Bible teaches quite the contrary: the equal standing of man and woman in creation and in the new creation in Christ.

The problem with these twelve biblical pillars of male hierarchy is not just that none of the texts to which they appeal actually affirm male hierarchy. The crucial problem of male hierarchy is that so many foundational principles of the Bible directly oppose it, including each the following theological axioms from Paul that man and woman are equally:

- Created in God’s image
- Given dominion over the earth
- Given the creation blessing
- Given the creation mandate
- In Christ

Each of the following theological axioms from Paul also entails the equality of man and woman:

- Mutual submission in the church.
- Mutual submission in marriage.
- The oneness of Christ’s body.
- The priesthood of all believers.
- Liberty in Christ.
- The new creation.
- Inaugurated eschatology.
- The Spirit gifts all for ministry.
- The nature of church leadership as service applies equally to man and woman.
- There is no male-female division in Christ.
- Male and female are not separate in the Lord.

Sadly, many still say the Bible excludes all women, even women God has called and gifted for ministry, from teaching or having authority over men in the church. This causes untold loss to the church and pain to those excluded. Similarly, many husbands use the Bible to assert authority over or even abuse their wives, rather than treat them as co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17; 1 Pet 3:7). Such dubious interpretations lead many to despise God’s Word as an oppressor of women. Most attribute their restrictions on women to Paul, the best-documented defender of the equality of men and women of all antiquity.

The Bible records many women as well as men leading the church. It teaches their shared authority and calls men and women to mutual submission in the church and marriage. The texts teaching these things are numerous and unambiguous. The weight of the biblical evidence topples each of these twelve pillars. There is no solid biblical foundation for male hierarchy. Scripture affirms instead, the equal standing of man and woman in the church and in the home.

Notes

1. Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) provides detailed supporting exegesis and documents evidence for each assertion in this article.

2. Moulton and Milligan, Friedrich Preisigke, Pierre Chantraine, S. C. Woodhouse and the thirteen additional lexicons cited by Richard S. Cervin, “Does *Kephalē* mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* 10 NS (1989): 85–112, 86–87. This also applies to the LSJ supplement by R. Renehan, *Greek Lexicographical Notes: A Critical Supplement to the Greek-English Lexicon of Liddell-Scott-Jones* (Hypomnemata

45; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 120.

3. Marcus Barth, *Ephesians* (2 vols.; AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) 1:184; Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Meaning and Metaphor in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 147, argues that “head” in 4:15 is a live metaphor for “source of the body’s life and growth.”

4. Payne, *Man and Woman*, 119, lists them and explains why other alleged instances do not meet this standard.

5. Every meaning of every related New Testament word that could apply here refers to leadership; cf. Payne, *Man and Woman*, 62–63.

6. See especially Eldon J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 110–21, and Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 165–186.

7. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997), 131.

8. Circa AD 370 Saint Basil, *The Letters* 69, line 45: “he [the bishop of Rome] may himself exercise full authority [ἀὐθῆεντῆσαι] in this matter, selecting men capable of enduring the hardships of a journey.” Roy J. Deferrari, trans., *Saint Basil* 2:40–43 (LCL).

9. Philip B. Payne, “1 Tim 2.12 and the Use of οὐδέ to Combine Two Elements to Express a Single Idea,” *NTS* 54 (2008): 235–53 examines every use of οὐδέ in Paul’s letters.

10. Cf. other affirmations of women teaching in Acts 18:26; 21:8–9; 1 Corinthians 11:5; 14:5, 24, 31, 39; 1 Timothy 3:1–2 (subject “whoever”); 2 Timothy 1:5 with 3:14–16; 2:2; Hebrews 3:1, 12; 5:12.

11. E.g. Genesis 1:26–29; 2:23–24; 3:6–13.

12. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “Charity, Clarity, and Hope: The Controversy and the Cause of Christ,” pages 403–22 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem; Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 409.

13. E.g. John 4:14–26; 11:25–26.

14. 384–322 BC Demosthenes, 24 (*Against Timocrates*), 197; 5th to 4th century BC Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 1116.

15. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:781.

16. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Romans* (Wilmington, Del.: Associated Publishers & Authors, n.d.), 1522.

17. Douglas J. Moo, “The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15: A Rejoinder,” *Trinity Journal* 2 NS (1981): 211; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Philip Payne on Familiar Ground: A Review of Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters*” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Spring 2010): 33–46, 35.

18. G. H. Hugenberger, “Women in Church Office: Hermeneutics or Exegesis? A Survey of Approaches to 1 Timothy 2:8–15” *JETS* 35/3 (1992): 341–60, 360 note 78.

19. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 333; D. B. Wallace, “Reconsidering ‘The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress Reconsidered,’” *NTS* 39 (1993): 290–296.

20. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 333. Carson, however, inconsistently calls Fee’s application of these same principles to 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, “weak and speculative” in “Silent in the Churches: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36,” pages 140–53 in *Manhood and Womanhood*, 142.

21. Payne, *Man and Woman*, 227–53, 253–65.

22. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 1187.

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