

Rationale for Women in Leadership **“Men and Women in Christ”**

Bible-based Christianity is threatened with a needless schism over the role of women in leadership in the local Church as well in marriage relationships. There has been the development of definitions of how those roles are clarified – complementarianism and egalitarianism.

Complementarians say that their rivals are disobeying God’s design, undermining both family and society, and giving encouragement to sexual confusion and immorality. Egalitarians say that complementarians are opposing God’s purposes, damaging Christian witness, and pouring fuel on the fires of domestic abuse, pornography and the denigration of women.

These far-reaching claims may seem out of proportion with the actual points of divergence. The debate is over the place of men and women in marriage and church leadership, as portrayed in the Bible.

Complementarians say that men must be leaders of their wives and that church roles involving authoritative teaching are reserved for men.

Egalitarians disagree on both points.

Christian unity is being damaged by a polarizing schism between egalitarians and complementarians.

The traditional interpretation of the Bible, to the effect that women are innately inferior to men, has rightly been rejected as being based more on patriarchal culture than on the actual text. Both egalitarians and complementarians now regard women and men as inherently equal and now affirm that women may be leaders in wider society. But complementarians insist on male leadership in the church and in marriage.

Faithful interpretation of the Bible gives Scripture priority over tradition, pays attention to culture, goes back to the source language in context, looks for coherence and takes a Christ-centred canonical approach; and it does this with spiritual openness and practical wisdom.

If Christian believers can move closer together on these issues, this will please the Lord and strengthen the church’s service as salt and light in a confused and hurting world.

A brief examination of key Biblical texts

1 Corinthians 7

1. Despite the prominence of 1 Corinthians 7 as the longest discussion of marriage in the New Testament, and despite its containing the only explicit New Testament mention of a husband’s authority, complementarian analyses have tended to overlook it or downplay it.
2. Here’s a overview of this text - Paul’s view of the world is Christ-centered. Creation remains in view, but redemption and new creation are in the foreground. His perspective on marriage takes into account that the Messiah has come and the end is in sight. This relativizes all the present circumstances of believers’ lives, which become unimportant in comparison with what is to come. In this light, he commends singleness and offers a strikingly equal view of marriage.

3. According to Paul in verses 3–5, husband and wife have equal authority. He repudiates unilateral decision-making. Leadership by a husband that is conceived in terms of one-way authority over his wife is in direct conflict with the apostle’s teaching.

1 Cor. 7:3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

4. Verses 3–5 cannot justifiably be regarded as a special exception to a husband’s unilateral authority, applicable only in the areas of sexual intercourse and joint prayer.
5. As far as can be determined from verses 1–16, 25–28, 32-40, Paul envisages complete equality of personal relations between men and women. If Paul believed in a hierarchical, unilateral authority of husband over wife, it appears inexplicable that he wrote these words.
6. This does not mean that Paul is an egalitarian in the modern sense. He is not calling for individuals to exercise their rights within marriage; rather, he is calling each equal partner to yield in *submission to the other*, in line with Romans 12:10; Galatians 5:13; Philippians 2:3.
7. 1 Corinthians 11:3 is a framework statement which acts as a heading to Paul’s remarks about praying and prophesying. It undergirds his reasoning.

11:3: “But 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.”

8. Many American complementarians appeal to the Trinity to sanction their theories of female subordination and hierarchy and patriarchalism.
 - a. Paul’s meaning cannot be safely or convincingly settled by appeal to fine nuances of the doctrine of the Trinity.
 - b. Word studies show that ‘authority over’ and ‘source’ are possible metaphorical of kephale (head) in verse 3. Usage elsewhere cannot determine Paul’s intended meaning in this verse. This must be sought by examining the context.
 - c. The hierarchical interpretation which sees Paul’s concern as being about men’s authority over women cannot be right, because it conflicts with the text in eight respects. Of particular importance, the hierarchical interpretation makes it necessary to disregard the function of Paul’s framework statement, to mistranslate verse 10 and to accept that Paul wrote verse 11 the wrong way around.
 - d. In the relevant cultural context, women’s hair was regularly on display rather than hidden by a veil (compare 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3). But pagan practices in Corinth encouraged dishonorable sexual behavior, both heterosexual and homosexual, and this was an issue for the Corinthian church. Men’s long hair, and women’s long hair let down

loose instead of fastened up on top of the head, both suggested a willingness to engage in such conduct.

- e. There are multiple difficulties in reading the passage as concerned with veils. Paul is writing about how hair is worn, not about the veiling of women. Properly translated, verses 2-16 are about hairstyles throughout, not about veils.
- f. The NIV is correct to translate *aner* and *gune* as respectively 'man' and 'woman' throughout the passage, and not as 'husband' and 'wife'. The Greek word, *Kephale*/head is about source.
- g. Once we accept that Paul's theological motif in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is sources, and that his subject matter is hairstyles worn by those who prophesy or pray aloud during assembled worship, we find that he is making a continuous, logical and connected argument. There are at least ten pointers to the substantial correctness of a sources and hairstyles interpretation of what Paul writes. The objections to a sources interpretation are unpersuasive. The hair conveyed a message.
- h. Paul's concern is not about hair itself, but about the dishonorable message given by the Corinthians' hairstyles. Their conduct should honor God' purposes for men and women as taught in Genesis and should not appear dishonoring and contrary to those purposes. Relevantly, those purposes involve faithful, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Paul also emphasizes redemption in Christ: though differentiated by their sexuality in creation, in redemption man and woman are united in the Lord. Men and women are interdependent and need each other's contributions. Prayer and prophecy should be undertaken by men and women in a way that honors God, the source both of creation and of redemption.
- i. Paul says nothing in this passage about male authority over women. Nor does he say anything about reserving some governing and teaching roles within the church to men. If notions of male authority over women and restrictions on women's ministry are to be supported, this needs to be done by reference to other passages of Scripture.

1 Corinthians 14

1. Paul, in 1 Cor 14 (text below), states that women should be "silent" in the churches, but this statement is right on the heels of women praying and women prophesied in Paul's presence. So, what gives? Since the disputed verse (14:34) comes in the middle of a discussion about church prophecy, I have the whole context in the NRSV:

1Cor. 14:26 What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church and speak to themselves and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged. 32 And the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets, 33 for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. (As in all the churches of the saints, 34 women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be

subordinate, as the law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?) 37 Anyone who claims to be a prophet, or to have spiritual powers, must acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. 38 Anyone who does not recognize this is not to be recognized. 39 So, my friends, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues; 40 but all things should be done decently and in order.

2. Verses 34–35 form a unit, separate from verse 33. Verse 33 should not be split into two and partly joined onto verse 34 as in some modern versions.
3. The content of these two verses is in severe conflict with the surrounding context. This conflict raises interpretive issues for which no satisfactory solution has been found.
4. Paul seems to say that women’s silence is required by a command of the Lord Jesus. This is a further puzzle.
5. In the absence of a satisfactory solution to the interpretive puzzles, we cannot tell what to make of these verses. In particular, we cannot judge whether a restriction on women’s speaking which is based on an Old Testament scripture which cannot be identified (v. 34) and on cultural grounds (v. 35) should or should not apply to churches in different times and cultures.
6. Some leading Biblical scholar offer conclusions to what they think is reasonable, namely, that 1 Cor 14:34-35 are not original, not authentic, not written by Paul. The study of textual criticism provides evidence that it may not have been part of the original text penned by Paul namely that some of our most ancient manuscripts of the New Testament do not present these verses - two leading manuscripts, Codex Fuldensis and Codex Vaticanus specifically.
 - a) Belief that Scripture as originally given is God’s revelation requires Christian scholars to try to ensure, so far as possible, that the church is using accurate copies and not treating copying errors or spurious alterations as authoritative.
 - b) The text which is printed as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in our current Bibles is probably not authentic. The best explanation of the totality of the evidence currently available is that someone other than Paul wrote verses 34-35 in the margin as an early gloss or comment. Copyists mistook this as part of the original letter and promoted it into the main text, but were unsure where to position it. They inserted it in two different positions (some after v. 33, others after v. 40).
 - c) This explanation accounts for all the available evidential data, both external and internal. It does not conflict with any credible evidence. It resolves every historical and interpretive problem associated with these verses, including all the relevant features of the evidence from the manuscripts. No other explanation fulfils these criteria.

When it comes to the gifting of women many erect an 8-foot can't-see-through-it fence that says "No Women Permitted" on the basis of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. In other words, men are behind the door determining who gets in (men) and who doesn't (women).

What was once settled opinion and established social practice has been rattled by changing social conditions and reexamination of settled opinion. Below are comments on this pertinent text:

1. The purpose of Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy is to combat false teaching and ungodliness and promote right teaching and godliness in Christ.
2. There is a debate about the meaning of Paul's restriction on women in 1 Timothy 2:11–15. Major difficulties which all interpreters must deal with include (a) the incompleteness of our information about the circumstances in Ephesus; (b) the uncertainty over the meaning of the rare verb *authenteom* verse 12; and (c) Paul's compressed style of writing in the critical passage.
3. The debate about the meaning of Paul's restriction is not a contest between an absolute and universal interpretation and a contingent and limited interpretation. Both sides recognize that Paul's intention must be limited in some way, in order to be consistent with his affirmations of teaching by women. The disagreement is about the nature of his intended limitation.
4. Egalitarians have suggested that Paul's restriction in verse 12 is limited to remedying a particular temporary problem in Ephesus. But they have struggled to find an explanation of Paul's meaning which both fits the available evidence about what was actually occurring at Ephesus and fits with the details of what Paul writes. I have drawn attention to four tough questions which egalitarian interpretations have difficulty in answering.
5. Complementarians contend that in verse 12 Paul is concerned with who delivers authoritative teaching in the church. But there are severe difficulties with this. They include the following: 'I do not permit' / 'I am not permitting' would be a strange choice of expression for stating an enduring rule applicable to all public assemblies of the church in all times and places. Paul's restriction applies to particular people over whom he has jurisdiction. This form of expression is not used anywhere else in the Bible for laying down an enduring rule. Inferring a principle of general application is dependent upon understanding verse 13 as Paul's appeal to a creation principle.
6. There is no clear statement by Paul that local church leadership must be exclusively male. If Paul meant in verse 12 to preserve male leadership authority, he should also have banned women from prophesying to men, but in 1 Corinthians he permitted it.
7. Scripture does not explicitly recognize a special activity of authoritative teaching that is different from other Christian teaching activities and that is allocated to a specific group of men.
8. If Paul really considers (as complementarians assert) that Genesis 2 teaches a creation principle of authoritative male leadership, which applies to the church, this principle should apply across the whole of life. But complementarians contradict this by their reluctance to apply it so widely. Their analysis does not provide a coherent explanation of Paul's reliance on Genesis.

9. The debate has reached an impasse. A fresh start is needed. Most commentators on both sides have proceeded on the basis that in 1 Timothy 2 Paul is giving instructions specifically for the conduct of the public assemblies of the church. But this does not fit the details of what Paul writes. To break the impasse, the first step is to recognize that chapter 2 is not focused on the public assembly.
10. Four keys open the way to an interpretation of 2:9—15 which is fully grounded in the literary and historical context.
 - a) The first is to ensure that we read those verses genuinely in the context of 1:1 — 2:8.
 - b) The second is to consider together the two extended passages about women in 1 Timothy. By seeing what can be gathered from 5 :3—16 concerning the historical context, we put ourselves more closely into Timothy's position as the first reader of the letter. This adds considerably to our understanding of 2:9—15.
 - c) The third key will be to ascertain the meaning of *authenteo* provisionally from the context, and then check it against the range of possible meanings.
 - d) The fourth key will be to pay attention to the signposts which Paul provides in verse 15.
11. Information about the historical background of the Ephesian church reveals a milieu in which magic arts and astrology were practised. In his letter Paul makes allusions to magic and to astrological lore. False teaching circulating in Ephesus includes sorcery and astrology. Resisting these influences is a spiritual battle against the unseen forces of evil.
12. Paul's concern in verses 11—12 is with certain wealthy women whose ungodly conduct evokes his strictures in verses 9-10. They are idle. They dress indecently and with extravagant display. They are going from house to house, each looking for a man who will satisfy her sexual desires, and promoting false teaching. Instead, these women should learn to do good works, in full submission to God, living; a quiet and godly life. These women are influenced by the evil one. It appears that these are the false teachers remaining in the church, whom Timothy charged to deal with. He must set them straight and ensure that none of them takes up a position as an elder or deacon in the church until she has proved her reformed life and character.
13. Using the third key, in the context of 1 Timothy 2:9-12 *authenteo* appears to mean 'overpower'. The nature of Paul's concern is: 'I am not permitting a woman false teacher with expensive and immodest dress, lacking decency and self-control, to teach and overpower a man: she is to be quiet and reverent and learn how to behave in accordance with the truth, in full submission to God.
14. This interpretation facilitates ready explanation of Paul's reasoning by reference to Genesis in verses 13—14. Paul is underlining what he says in verses 11-12 by referring back to the first spiritual battle recounted in Scripture, where a woman was deceived by the Satan into receiving forbidden knowledge, and falsely taught and overpowered a man, with dire results.
15. Paul chooses this rare word because of its use in the same sense in astrological lore, which forms part of the false teaching which the wealthy women are promoting. It is also associated with sorcery and with death, the opposite of salvation.

16. This line of interpretation illuminates the meaning of verse 15, traditionally regarded as a difficult verse. It refers to salvation brought about through the birth of the Messiah, with a sidelong glance at the beliefs of the Artemis cult.
17. Using the fourth key, we find that Paul provides two signposts in verse 15. He signals to the reader that he is equating 'woman' in verses 11–12 ('she' in v. 15) with 'women' in verses 9–10 ('they' in v. 15). This confirms that Paul's instruction in verses 11–12 is intended to relate to the women of verses 9–10. He also uses unusual vocabulary to construct a conspicuous verbal and thematic link between 2:15 (teknogonia) and 5:14 (teknogoneo). This is further confirmation that readers may get a better contextual understanding by reading his remarks about women in chapter 2 alongside his remarks about women in chapter 5.
18. The above interpretation fits into Paul's continuous, connected train of thought which starts in chapter 1 and proceeds through the letter. It shows how chapter 2 leads into chapter 3. It also resolves the four tough questions about 2:12 to which I drew attention in chapter 11 above.
19. Conclusion – 1 Timothy 2 does not justify a general ban on teaching by women in the church, or on the exercise of authority by women in the church.

Jesus' teaching informed the Apostle Paul's view of the world

Jesus was very clear - being willing to take the lowest place for the good of others is at the heart of Christian love and living. Jesus taught this and also lived it, both in his ministry and supremely at the cross (Mark 10:42-45; John 13:1-17; 15:12-17). Because Paul's view of the world is Christ-centered, this theme is often picked up in his teaching:

'loving,... preferring one another in honor' (Rom. 12:10)

'in your relationship with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...' (Phil. 2:5ff)

This has significant implications.

The fellowship of God's church is built not on hierarchies but on humble love.

1. It is true that Paul is not opposed to hierarchies where they are appropriate. In his ancient context, hierarchies were the contextual reality.
2. The word 'submit' (hupotasso) carries the idea of being ranked below someone else. But Paul's instruction to wives to submit does not of itself imply the existence of a hierarchy in marriage. We have to decide whether he means that wives should submit because their husbands are in authority over them or whether he means that wives should behave as if their husbands ranked above them.
3. Submission in Christian relationships does not mean giving unquestioning obedience to another person. There is no Christian duty to follow another person into wrongdoing.
4. There was not a uniform view of marriage in first-century culture, but typically the husband had unilateral authority over the wife.
5. Paul's instructions to wives to submit, and to husbands to love, are partly driven by practical considerations.
6. Paul endorses the authority of parents over children but not of slave owners over slaves. Comparing the three household relationships (wife to husband, child to father, slave to master) does not establish that Paul approves of husbands having unilateral authority over their wives.

Genesis and Women and Men

Historically, Genesis 1-3 have been used by people within Christian community to justify hierarchical understandings of relationships and Church leadership. Here are some observations from the text:

1. The complementarian interpretation of Genesis 1-3, which argues for male leadership authority, lacks explicit support in the biblical text. It depends on implications which are at best uncertain. None of them is a necessary implication from the text.
2. To be male or female is a created fact of life. The presentation of woman as made to be man's powerful ally indicates a definite differentiation of men and women.
3. The Genesis text does not define or develop this differentiation. It leaves open the possibility that other scriptures could indicate responsibilities of leadership. But it does not establish male rule. The rule of a man over his wife, as described in Genesis 3:16, is presented as a negative consequence of the fall. This is not something to be deliberately perpetuated or increased.
4. Teaching about creation cannot provide a definitive answer concerning Christian marriage, because we must go beyond the question 'How did God order the original creation before the fall?' and ask also 'What is God's purpose for redeemed human beings?' and 'In the light of that purpose, how are we to live now?'
5. The institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24 has spiritual significance as pointing forward to the union of Christ and his church (Eph. 5:31). Even if the complementarian interpretation of Genesis 1 – 3 were correct, it would not follow that in Christ the husband should rule the wife. Redemption in Christ is taking believers forward into the new creation, not backwards to before the fall.
6. Old Testament examples of women's leadership with God's approval are inconsistent with there being a principle that women may never lead men or exercise authority over them.

How Did We Get Here?: Misogyny in the Church and World (part 1)

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This is a two part series. In part one, we'll trace the history and impact of misogyny. In part two, we'll explore what Jesus has to say about healthy, whole, male-female relationships in a more just world.

The #MeToo movement uncovered a fault line running across the entire country. Revelation after painful revelation exposed the pervasiveness of misogyny and sexual brokenness in the United States. Among the accused were Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein, politicians Roy Moore and Al Franken, talk show host Matt Lauer, physician Larry Nassar, and perhaps most shocking, Willow Creek's founder and head pastor Bill Hybels.

The charges certainly didn't come as a surprise to the 321,500 Americans who are victims of sexual assault or rape every year. After all, this type of misbehavior has been happening for centuries. What was surprising was how quickly women mobilized and how effectively their unified voices shook the status quo.

I've spent the last ten months watching this unfold and wondering: what's next? Will women continue to courageously share their stories? Will Americans reckon with how our hyper-sexualized, misogynistic culture makes it nearly impossible to honor each other, form healthy relationships, and work together as equals?

However the culture at large decides to respond, Christians have an incredible opportunity to lead the nation beyond #MeToo. We have a chance to eradicate misogynistic behaviors and forge healthy partnerships between men and women. But in order to create a new and better path, we must examine our deeply embedded patriarchal patterns and learn from them.

A Brief History of Misogyny

The world did not become sexually broken overnight. It's been a long time in the making. The word "misogyny" is of Greek derivation and means "the hatred of women." Because very few men actually hate women, the definition needs to be expanded.

Misogyny is at work any time women are devalued, taken advantage of, overpowered, or marginalized. When a woman performs the same job with the same level of expertise but gets paid substantially less than a man (on average, 20% less), that's misogyny. A battered wife is a victim of misogyny. When a woman is raped and then questioned about what she was wearing, that's a double dose of misogyny. Misogyny tends to blame women for evil, even when evil is done to them.

Assumedly, the Greeks coined the word because they needed to describe how they were treating women and girls. The Greco-Roman world created breath-taking works of art, architectural masterpieces, and even the template for Western democracy. They also denied women a voice in that same government, widely practiced abortion, and left unwanted baby girls on their front steps or at garbage dumps where opportunistic families could take them and raise them as slaves or prostitutes.

Even today, carrying two X chromosomes can be akin to a death sentence. In China, India, Pakistan, and other countries, women are encouraged (or even mandated) to abort baby girls or to commit infanticide after their birth. According to author and journalist Sheryl WuDunn, "In the last half century, more girls were discriminated to death than all the people killed on all the battlefields in the 20th century."

How Misogyny Leads to Sexual Brokenness

Misogynistic beliefs often lead to sexual brokenness and sexualized violence because these unbiblical constructs permit men to abuse their power, refuse accountability, and mistreat rather than honor women. This is evident across the globe.

Like many other nations, the United States has an extensive and sordid history along these lines. From colonial times until the 1960s, black women were systematically raped by white men with total impunity. (Read *At the Dark End of the Street* for more on this.) A 2012 survey done by the Center for Disease Control states that one in five women (and one in seventy-one men) have been raped at some point in their lives.

Larry Nassar's case illustrates just how long perpetrators can continue their criminal activity when those in authority are complicit. The USA Gymnastics' team doctor sexually abused more than 160 young women and girls over the course of approximately twenty years, some as young as age six, even though multiple supervisors had been told what was going on.

While not as egregious as rape or other forms of sexualized violence, pornography is another manifestation of misogyny. It denigrates women, distorts God's intention for our sexuality, and has a far-reaching, nefarious impact. By depicting violent and dehumanizing sexual encounters, pornography programs men and boys to believe that women enjoy being mistreated. Statistics indicate that one eighth of all Americans regularly visit porn sites. That's forty million people who are objectifying and exploiting the women (and men) who appear on their screens.

How Misogyny Affects Men

Women and children are the most obvious victims of misogyny but men are also adversely affected. Carolyn Custis James writes in *Malestrom*:

“Men have lost sight of who God created them to be as human beings and as men. ... Through cultural conditioning that takes both benign and violent forms, they are cut off from significant, God-given parts of themselves that lead to human wholeness for fear it will make them less of a man.”

When the dominate narrative communicates that A.) manhood is measured by virility and that B.) men who possess traits perceived as feminine (e.g. empathy, sensitivity, or nurture) are less than, it fractures men's souls and leaves them feeling trapped by misguided cultural expectations.

A Complicit Church

In one way or another, we're all diminished by the long reach of misogyny— including the church. This is why activists Hannah Paasch and Emily Joy followed up the #MeToo hashtag with #ChurchToo. Churches should be safe places for everyone, not breeding grounds for perpetrators. But wherever unrestrained power and toxic masculinity are not redeemed by the cross, death and destruction will follow.

This is true across every denomination, as evidenced by Catholic priests who have engaged in pedophilia and Protestant organizations that have attempted to silence victims and cover-up sexual abuse. The latter include allegations against Bob Jones University (sexual abuse concealed by high level officials), Patrick Henry College (covering up on-campus rapes), and Sovereign Grace Ministries (which allegedly ignored two-decades of child sexual abuse).

Churches or Christian organizations that are rife with misogyny often abuse Scripture to protect their power. For example, when a denomination or church culture interprets passages such as Ephesians 5:22-24 and 1 Corinthians 7:5 to mean that husbands have the right to sex on demand, wives may conclude that their needs and desires are irrelevant and that they have no choice but to submit, regardless of the personal cost.

My husband and I recently taught a workshop on marital intimacy. One young couple walked out as we were explaining the importance of a wife being able to say "no." On the post-conference evaluation form, one comment (we assume it was theirs) read, "There's nothing in Scripture about mutuality in the bedroom. When I want [sex], I get it." I grieve for his wife and all wives who have to endure that kind of selfish power play. And I pity the husband because he will most likely never experience the deep intimacy that results when a couple can completely trust and respect each other.

It's impossible to pinpoint the exact cause of misogyny, but sin (both personal and generational), group think, evil spiritual forces (Eph. 6:12), the lure of power, and an inadequate understanding of God's Word all contribute. In part 2, we'll explore how God's creative intent for humanity provides the antidote to misogyny.

The Gospel: Antidote To Misogyny? (part 2)

In part 1 of this series, we established that sin, group think, evil spiritual forces, misuse of power, and an inadequate understanding of Scripture have led to misogyny and broken expressions of sexuality. Now that the origin and manifestations of misogyny are clearer, we can explore how the gospel offers the solution.

A Biblical Hermeneutic of Gender and Sexuality

Before we can experience whole and healthy relationships characterized by mutual respect and honor, we need to grasp God's creative intent for humanity. Genesis 1 reads,

Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us." ...So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground." (Gen. 1:26-31 NLT)

These passages reveal that men and women are created as different but equal image bearers and are given the exact same mandate from God to be fruitful (not only through procreation but also via all other forms of creating) and to care for the earth and the earth's inhabitants.

In Genesis 2, the creation story gets more specific. "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." (Gen. 2: 18 NLT) The Hebrew word for helper is *ezer* which essentially means warrior sidekick—not subordinate or servant.

Per God's design, "a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." (Gen. 2:24) This is a breath-taking directive—one that elevates the purpose and the practicality of marriage beyond the ancient Middle East norms that mandated women leaving their own families to become the property of their husband's clan.

Jumping ahead to the New Testament, Jesus' interactions with women reveal a powerful alternative to the world's—and some churches'—understanding of male-female relationships. When he spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, he did not take advantage of or demean her but instead engaged with her theologically and personally.

Later, when "a sinful woman" poured perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair—a scandalously sensual act—he did not shame her or accuse her of trying to tempt him, but instead commended her before the men who were present (Luke 36:50). Again and again, he honored women and overturned oppressive gender hierarchies.

A New Way Forward

Given our legacy of broken relationships and deeply entrenched misogynistic practices, how can we follow Jesus' example and create a culture where the full flourishing of both men and women is normative? In

Jesus Feminist, author Sarah Bessey writes, “Sometimes we turn over tables in the temple, and other times, we invite conversations and start with an apology.” In this situation, we need both tactics.

#MeToo turned the tables over on the men both inside and outside the church who assumed they could continue to mistreat women without repercussion. However, just because women have decided that they’re no longer going to keep silent when they’re abused or mistreated does not change the reality that men still have more power—both in terms of physical strength and corporate structure.

For the misogyny-fueled mistreatment of women to end, men will need to both acknowledge how vulnerable they are to the invisible pull of power and, as a way of resisting that vortex, choose to give it away rather than hoard it.

Relinquishing power never comes easy. Men can move in this direction by choosing to relate to power as Jesus did. Though he had the capacity to call down legions of angels to smite the soldiers who pounded nails through his flesh, he surrendered that same power in order to free us from sin and death. His remarkable, universe-altering choice opens up the possibility for us to use whatever power we have for redemptive, life-giving purposes.

In order for this paradigm shift to happen, men and women will need to engage in honest conversations about broken relational dynamics and courageously confront any of the ways that cultural narratives have superseded Scriptural narratives.

For example, did God design men to have insatiable sex drives, which is how it’s often spun—even from the pulpit? Or, is this a direct result of the fall, compounded by the entertainment industry and unrelenting advertising campaigns that mock men’s integrity, objectify women’s bodies, and use sex to sell everything from internet hosting to M&Ms? If we want a culture where both women and men can fully thrive without the threat of abuse or rape, we have to boldly confront and reject any unbiblical ideologies.

As a woman, one of the most powerful aspects of the #MeToo movement was when men began to listen and understand how their misogynistic beliefs and behaviors deeply wounded us. The week #MeToo swept across the internet, pastor Brad Wong of The River Church in San Jose, CA, led the men in his congregation to kneel during the Sunday morning service and audibly confess any of the ways that they had dishonored or disrespected women. I wept in gratitude upon hearing this.

Acknowledging mistreatment and abuse through confession is an integral step in repairing broken male-female relationships. Confession should include overt sins as well as stealthy sins of the heart such as apathy and cowardice. Much like systemic racism, sexualized violence and mistreatment of women will not end until enough men interrupt their brothers’ behavior. And if confession does not lead to repentance, it’s meaningless.

Honest confession and true repentance not only break the deadening silence that so often accompanies sexual abuse, they also pave the way for forgiveness. Rachel Denhollander, a lawyer who brought charges against sexual abuser Larry Nassar—and one of his victims—made this statement to her perpetrator during his trial:

Should you ever reach the point of truly facing what you have done, the guilt will be crushing. And that is what makes the gospel of Christ so sweet. Because it extends grace and hope and mercy where none should be found. ... I pray you experience the soul crushing weight of guilt so you may someday experience true repentance and true forgiveness from God, which you need far more than forgiveness from me, though I extend that to you as well.

Forgiveness is a powerful thing. As I write in *Making Marriage Beautiful*, “When we drop the charges against those who have sinned against us, we are not excusing their actions, minimizing the damages, or opening ourselves up to further mistreatment. We are simply agreeing that Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross is sufficient.”

Victims get to determine the timeline for offering forgiveness. The church tends to rush victims to forgive, but victims must have agency to process their trauma and respond to the perpetrator when they are ready. Otherwise, they may be re-traumatized. Further, it's crucial to note that forgiveness does not necessitate reconciliation with an abuser.

By asking perpetrators to confess and repent and victims to forgive, Jesus is inviting us to follow him to the cross and the tomb, so that ultimately, we can share in his resurrection power and bring his kingdom to the earth. In the process, we learn how to love, honor, and respect each other.

When these heart issues have been addressed, there will not be a need for rigid boundaries (e.g. Billy Graham's rule of not meeting one-on-one with any woman other than his wife). Graham's practice might be appropriate in some cultures and for some men, but it's a culturally bound concession, not a biblical mandate. According to author Carolyn Custis James, "If men diagnose the danger as outside of themselves, they've misdiagnosed their problem. Jesus nails it by pointing out that lust is about a man's eyes and his heart, not the women. Christian men should be the safest [men] for women to be around."

Custis James continues, "The notion that things work better and human beings become their best selves when men and women work together is found on page one of the Bible. When God was launching the most ambitious enterprise the world has ever known, the team He put together to do the job was male and female." And according to Scripture, that team was very good.

It's undeniable that the #MeToo movement successfully empowered women to no longer live as silent victims. Time will tell if it also helps to reduce misogynistic practices such as rape and sexual harassment. One thing is certain: the church has the potential to lead this relational revolution—provided that men honor women as equal co-heirs and use their power to ensure that every human being has the opportunity to fully flourish.

What Did Women Do in the Bible?

Adapted from Dr. Scot McKnight

Many people, when a discussion arises about women in church ministries, gravitate to Paul's two famous statements — that women should be silent in the churches:

Women should remain *silent* in the churches. They are *not allowed to speak*, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (1 Corinthians 14:34–35, emphasis added)

A woman should learn *in quietness and full submission*. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; *she must be quiet*. (1 Timothy 2:11–12, emphasis added)

Some people are for and some are against women serving in leadership ministries. And it seems that both kinds of people gravitate to these “prohibitive” texts. In some ways, this a bit like asking about marriage in the Bible and gravitating toward the divorce texts. Yes, these statements by Paul about silence are important and they need to be looked at carefully, but there are other important passages in the Bible that we need to look at as well.

The Story of the Bible

Throughout its pages, the Bible tells us many stories about women in various roles of servant leadership. To name some of the more obvious women, think of Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah; think of Esther and the woman in the Song of Songs; think of Priscilla, Junia, and Phoebe. Consider Mary, mother of Jesus, whose influence on Jesus, James, and other early Christians is largely ignored. Many more names could be mentioned.

What did these women do? They were prophets, they were teachers, they were ministry leaders, they were civic leaders, they were apostles, and they were local church mentors.

As people committed to restoring, in our church, the vision of the Bible, we need to wrestle with the key question: Do we permit women to do in our churches what women did in the Bible and in the early churches?

Whatever Paul meant by *silence*, he did not mean to say that the passages that tell us what women were doing in the early church were obsolete after he wrote about silence. We are understanding and applying the silence Paul talks about, in biblical ways, *only if we permit women to do today what women can be found doing in the Bible*.

So now we ask: What did women do in the Bible? If we want to be biblical, this question needs to be asked and answered.

The place to begin is with an all-encompassing text — the creation narrative — that establishes how the Bible's story is to be read.

Creation and New Creation

If we read the Bible as an, “Epic Story,” we begin all questions of the Bible at the beginning, with Genesis 1–3. And if we begin there, the entire story is reshaped. We learn from these chapters that God created male and female as mutuals — made for each other — and they were at one with each another. The fall distorted mutuality by turning women against men and men against women; oneness became otherness and rivalry for power. Here are the climactic words of judgement from Genesis 3:16: “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

The fall turned the woman to seek dominance over the man, and the fall turned the man to seek dominance over the woman. A life of struggling for control is the way of life for the fallen. But the good news story of the Bible is that the fall eventually gives way to new creation; the fallen can be reborn and re-created. Sadly, the church has far too often *perpetuated the fall as a permanent condition*. Perpetuating the fall entails failing to *restore creation conditions* when it comes to male and female relationships. This goes against both Jesus and Paul, who each read the Bible as a story that moves from creation (oneness) to new creation (oneness).

For example, Jesus informed his disciples that although Moses permitted divorce (which annihilates the Creator's designed union in marriage), *divorce was not God's original intention*. Permanence, love, oneness, and mutuality were God's intent in original creation. Jesus, then, appeals to the biblical story, to the original creation, to show how God's people are supposed to live in the new creation. Moses' permission for divorce pertains, it appears, to a life too deeply marred by the fall. The Jesus community undoes the distortions of the fall because it seeks to live out the fullness of the entire biblical story.

Additionally, the apostle Paul twice appeals to original creation to explain God's redemption. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul says: "If anyone is in Christ, *the new creation* has come: The old [the fall] has gone, the new [new creation] is here!" (emphasis added). What can this mean but that the implications of the fall are being *undone* for those who are in Christ? This draws us directly back to Genesis 3:16 to see that the otherness struggle between the sexes for control has been ended because we are now living together in the new creation. New creation means we are being restored to the equality and mutuality of Genesis 1–2.

Again, Paul does much the same in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, *neither male nor female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (emphasis added). The words Paul uses for "male ... female" are quoted directly from Genesis 1:27, the original creation story. The word "one" evokes God's oneness and God's design for oneness among his created beings. What is Paul claiming here? He is — and notice this carefully — contending that in Christ we return to Eden's mutuality. He is contending that life in Christ creates unity, equality, and oneness.

What we learn from Genesis 1–2, then, is that God originally made Adam and Eve as mutuals, that the fall distorted that relationship, and that the story of the Bible's plot leads us to see redemption in Christ as new creation. *Both Jesus and Paul see in Genesis 1–2 the original design for what Christ's redemption brings to men and women in this world.*

If there is any place in the world where this mutuality should be restored, it should be in the church.

We now move to some specific women in the Old Testament, taking into consideration concrete examples of what women did in the Bible.

What Did Women Do in the Old Testament? Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah

That God could raise up women into public roles of servant leadership can be seen in three women who come alive in the pages of the Old Testament. They are part of Israel's story, and no storytelling is complete and balanced if it does not include them. Miriam was one of Israel's spiritual servant leaders, Deborah was a civic leader of God's people, and Huldah was a prophet outstanding among other prophets.

Miriam: Spiritual Servant-Leader

Miriam was one-third of ancient Israel's original leadership team: Moses as lawgiver, Aaron as priest, and Miriam as *prophetess*. When the children of Israel escaped the clutches of Pharaoh, it was Miriam who led the Israelites into worship with these inspired words:

*Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea. (Exodus 15:21)*

The Song of Moses, found now at Exodus 15:1–18, may well have been composed under inspiration by Miriam. Other women are found singing within the pages of the Bible's story — women like Deborah (Judges 5:1–31), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1–10), and Mary (Luke 1:46–55). Singing was connected to the gift of prophecy in the Bible (1 Chronicles 25:1–8). When a later prophet, Micah, spoke of Israel's deliverance, he saw three leaders in Israel: "I brought you up out of Egypt ... I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam" (Micah 6:4).

Miriam was the one who fetched Moses from the Nile; as Moses' older sister she no doubt participated in Moses' own family celebrations of Passover in Egypt; and as older sister she sang alongside Moses and Aaron about God's deliverance, and helped offer guidance to the people of God.

Deborah: Civic Leader

Judges 4–5 reveals that God called women — it is not mentioned that Deborah is an "exception" — to lead his people. But her story reveals she was truly exceptional.

Like Miriam, Deborah was a *prophet*: "Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading [Hebrew word: *shapat*] Israel at that time" (Judges 4:4). When the Bible says she was "leading" Israel, it uses the term for the *judge* of Israel. She was to her generation what Moses was to his.

The word translated "judged" (*shapat*) combines the ideas of "national leadership," "judicial decisions," and "political, military deliverer." If we ask what did women do in the Bible, and we ask this question of Deborah, we learn that women could speak for God as a prophet, render decisions in a law court as a judge, exercise civic leadership over the entire nation of Israel, and be a military commander who brought Israel to victory.

Huldah: Prophet

When King Josiah is informed of the discovery of the long-lost Torah in the temple, a certain Shaphan reads the text to Josiah. The king, who has "the most responsive royal heart since the hearing heart of Solomon," realizes the nation has failed to live according to God's covenant. He falls apart in godly repentance and needs discernment. What should he do? To which of God's prophets shall he send word to consult?

Here are his options: he can consult Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, or Huldah. The first four have books in Israel's collection of prophets. But he chooses the female prophet, Huldah, *above the rest*. Huldah is not chosen because no men were available; she is chosen because she is truly exceptional among the prophets.

She confirms that the scroll is indeed God's Torah and this, in some sense, authorizes this text as Israel's Scriptures from this time on. Furthermore, prophetess Huldah, unafraid to tell the truth,

informs Josiah that indeed God's wrath is against the disobedience of this nation. But, she adds, because the king has humbled himself before God, he will be gathered to his ancestors in peace. All of this is found in 2 Kings 22.

Conclusion

From this brief sketch, we can repeat the question: What did women do?

They spoke for God;
they led the nation of
Israel; they sanctioned
Scripture; and
they guided nations back to the path of righteousness.

But that was then, and this is now. What about in the New Testament? Did women's roles decrease or increase? If one takes into consideration the story form of the Bible and one considers that Jesus ushers in the beginning of new creation, one should not be surprised to learn that women begin where the Old Testament leaves off and take on new responsibilities.

What Did Women Do in the New Testament?

Mary, Junia, Priscilla, Phoebe

We start to respond to this question with Mary, the mother of Jesus. As we dig deeper into her story and other New Testament women, an overarching theme of oneness — of God's restoring men and women to be one in Christ — begins to take on concrete realities.

Mary: A Woman of Influence

To begin with, Mary was the mother of the Messiah, and it was no small vocation to be part of forming Jesus the Messiah as he matured. Furthermore, if early historical tradition is accurate, Mary was a widow, so when we look at her influence in the early church, we are looking at a widow. As we look carefully at scripture, Mary's influence emerges in her training of Jesus and of his brother James, and she was critical in the formation of our Gospels.

Mary had a powerful influence on her sons—including Jesus. Theological themes from Mary's majestic *Magnificat* show up centrally both in the teachings of Jesus and in the letter of James, making it clear that Mary *taught* and was involved in the *spiritual formation* of Jesus and James.

No one would claim that Jesus learned *only* from Mary; of course he learned from Joseph and from others. But can we expect that God would give Mary to Jesus as a mother and *not* qualify her to be a singular and godly influence on him? Absolutely not.

Junia: Outstanding Among the Apostles

Here is all we know about Junia: "Greet Andronicus and *Junia*, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are *outstanding among the apostles*, and they were in Christ before I was" (Romans 16:7, emphasis added). Here are words that have been silenced perhaps more than any other words in the Bible about women: "outstanding among the apostles." Junia is an outstanding (female) apostle, though to be sure, being a woman had little to do with it. What mattered were her intelligence, her giftedness, and her calling.

Junia and her husband, Andronicus, also an apostle, were relatives of Paul. They came to faith in

Christ prior to Paul's own conversion, and they were imprisoned with Paul (no doubt because they were believers and leaders among the Christians).

But more importantly, Andronicus and Junia are "outstanding" or "prominent" among the apostles. This could mean they were recognized as leaders by the apostles, but the evidence in the early church is that everyone translated this expression as "prominent apostles" among the first generation of Christians. Perhaps we should take a deep breath and get our bearings before we go any further. A statement by St. Chrysostom, a famous preacher and theologian who read and preached in Greek, seals the deal; italics used for the most significant words:

"Greet Andronicus and Junia...who are outstanding among the apostles": To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles — just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.

It is clear that Junia was a woman and Junia was an apostle. But what kind of apostle? She clearly was not one of the twelve apostles chosen and sent out by Jesus. So, what kind was she? The answer is in the Bible. As the story of the Bible unfolds, not only were there the twelve apostles but there were some "lesser" apostles—what Wheaton Professor Doug Moo calls "traveling missionaries." There were others in the New Testament called "apostle" in this sense, including Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James (Galatians 1:19), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), and those who are called "apostles of the churches" (2 Corinthians 8:23). Even if we rank Junia among the missionary apostles, she is still an apostle and is considered top drawer for her work.

What kind of work did that involve? Otherwise stated, what did women do as traveling missionaries and church founders? We cannot be absolutely sure, but those gifts had to include such things as evangelizing, teaching, and establishing as well as helping to guide church ministries through servant leadership. Underneath it all would have been an exemplary character of godliness and love that provided a template for others to observe and imitate.

Priscilla: A Teacher of Scripture and Theology

We know much more about Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, than we do of Junia. Aquila and Priscilla were from Rome (Acts 18:2); they were kicked out of Rome when Claudius ordered all "Jews" to evacuate. They became acquainted with the Apostle Paul in Corinth and began to make tents together (18:3). This friendship led to their traveling with Paul to Ephesus, where — and here we are offered another glimpse into what women did in the early churches — Priscilla and Aquila "explained to [Apollos] the way of God more adequately" (18:26). This husband and wife, instead of fighting for power with one another (cf. Genesis 3:16), worked together in powerful ways for the gospel. The mutuality theme is clearly present in their marriage relationship.

There are some details here that deserve a careful look. First, Priscilla's name is almost always given first. Listing a woman's name first was not impossible in the ancient world, but it was definitely unusual. Notice these references: Acts 18:18, 19, 26; Romans 16:3; 2 Timothy 4:19. The only exceptions are Acts 18:2 and 1 Corinthians 16:19.

More importantly, "they" — and again her name is first — "explained" to the scholar Apollos "the way of God more adequately." Priscilla knew her theology and her Bible, and she knew it so well she could lead Apollos from a John-the-Baptist-faith to a Jesus-faith.

This husband-wife ministry team taught Apollos so well he was able — two verses later — to refute nonmessianic Jews in public debate by opening up the Scriptures for them (Acts 18:28). Clearly Priscilla was a theological teacher. This is why Priscilla and Aquila are called Paul's "co-workers"

in Romans 16:3. “Co-worker” was Paul’s special term for his associates in church ministries. What did they do? They — including Priscilla — shared with Paul in being called by God, in preaching the gospel, in carrying on pastoral work with churches, and in risking their lives for their faith.

What did women do in the New Testament church? We have one woman who was an apostle and another one who was a fellow worker and teacher. We must look at one more — a woman who was at a minimum the official interpreter of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Phoebe: Deacon and Benefactor

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a *deacon* of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the *benefactor* of many people, including me. (Romans 16:1–2, emphasis added)

One of the most noticeable features of women in the earliest churches was that they directed their own households. So, when the churches moved into the homes, these household-directing women became de facto directors and leaders of local household churches. A good example is Phoebe. Unlike Priscilla and Junia, who were both married, Phoebe’s husband is never mentioned. This could very well indicate that she was single. Perhaps she was a widow. We cannot be sure. She stands in this text alone as a single woman. What matters is her calling from God and her giftedness. Paul tells us that she was from Cenchreae, a city just outside of Corinth in Greece, and that she had traveled to Rome.

What did Phoebe do? To begin with, Phoebe is called a “deacon.” This word “deacon” is the same word in the New Testament, whether the person is a man or a woman, for a leader in the church. When Paul calls Phoebe a “deacon,” he is describing her as one who exercised a ministry, or service, in the church.

What kind of ministry? Deacons are often connected to “ministry/service of the word” in Paul’s letters — see, for example, 1 Corinthians 3:5–9.6 But, since Phoebe is called “a deacon *of the church* in Cenchreae,” we should think of her “ministry” in terms of the list of qualifications and ministries we find in 1 Timothy 3:8–12. Doug Moo describes a safe conclusion: “It is likely that deacons were charged with visitation of the sick, poor relief, and perhaps financial oversight.” Others think more is involved, that is, that “deacon” describes an official ministry of God’s Word.

At some level Phoebe was a “minister.” When Paul asks the church at Rome to “receive her,” he surely has in mind that they are to roll out a red carpet of hospitality — the way they do for “saints.”

But it is also possible that Phoebe, a benefactor or wealthy patron of Paul’s ministry of bringing the gospel to the Roman Empire, was responsible for getting this letter to the right people. Most scholars today think Phoebe was Paul’s courier for the letter to the Romans. Since couriers were charged with responsibility to explain their letters, Phoebe probably read the letter aloud and answered questions the Christians in Rome may have had. Phoebe, to put this directly, can thus be seen as the first “commentator” on the letter to the Romans.

One more point. One of Phoebe’s most important contributions was providing funds. It is worth noting that in the fourth century, in an inscription found on Jerusalem’s Mount of Olives, a woman named Sophia was called the “new Phoebe” or the “second Phoebe” because of her financial support for Christian ministries.

What Did Women Do?

What did women do? Another way of asking this question is this: What did women do if we read the New Testament as Story? How do we see the oneness theme begin to take shape in the story

of the New Testament?

Mary was influential with Jesus and James and gave to Luke crucial information for writing his gospel.

Junia was an apostle who was involved in missionary work.

Priscilla taught Bible and theology alongside her husband.

Phoebe financially supported the apostle Paul in his ministry, carried his letter to Rome, and helped to explain its contents as Paul prepared for his Spanish mission.

These women were influential, they were a source for stories about Jesus, they were church planters, they were teachers, they were benefactors and interpreters of Paul's letters.

Furthermore, we learn a little more about each: Junia and Priscilla were married, but Mary was a widow and Phoebe may well have been single. There is no indication that women could teach and lead only if they were connected to a male who was also a leader. And, to tie these four women into the story of the Bible, each of these women exhibits the mutuality (or oneness) theme that begins in creation, is threatened by the fall, and begins to become more and more a reality in Christ.

If women did all this, why does Paul speak of silencing women in public assemblies? How does such silencing fit within the theme of oneness — of God's work of redemption, restoring men and women into unity in Christ? This is where reading the Bible as Story, asking, "What did women do?" becomes important.

Furthermore, it means that though we may read the Bible *with* tradition (where women are silenced), we are at times called to challenge the tradition.

What Was Going On in Corinth and Ephesus?

We have already sketched some passages in the story of the Bible where we discover the presence of women in leadership and public ministries. We have called these passages the, "What did women do?" passages. Now for a theoretical point with enormous significance for women in ministry: some believe the "silencing" passages should control the, "What did women do?" passages. Such persons give any number of reasons, but the point needs to be made clear: such persons believe the silencing passages are permanent and there is no place in the local church today for women prophets, apostles, or servant leaders, or for women to perform any kind of teaching ministry.

There is a troubling irony in this approach, and it concerns whether we Christians are to live under the conditions of the fall or under the conditions of the new creation, whether we are to emphasize otherness or oneness. To understand this, look again at the words in Genesis 3:16: "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." These words are not an ironclad rule for the rest of history.

Sadly, some think Genesis 3:16 is a *prescription* for the relationship of women and men for all time. Instead of a prescription, these two lines are a *prediction* of the fallen desire of fallen women and fallen men in a fallen condition in a fallen world. Fallen women yearn to dominate the man, and fallen men yearn to dominate women. The desire to dominate is a broken desire. The redeemed desire is to love in mutuality. In other words, Genesis 3, predicts a struggle of fallen wills; it does not prescribe how we are *supposed* to live.

Genesis 3:16 speaks of fallen humans seeking to control other people. But the fall is not the last word in the Bible, and surely the Song of Songs is a profound example of Israelites finding a better

way than what is found in Genesis 3:16. Even more for the Christian we have to factor in new creation, the day God began to renew all things in Jesus Christ and in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Here is the most important verse in the Bible about new creation: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christian men and women are to live a life that moves beyond the fall, beyond the battle of wills. If new creation does anything, it unleashes the power to undo the fall in our world. This cannot be emphasized enough: the story of the Bible is the story of new creation in Christ. The words of Genesis 3:16, to put the matter directly, are overcome in new creation. These words in Genesis 3:16 are not words for anyone other than unredeemed, fallen women and men. Newly created followers of Christ can find a better way in mutuality. Paul teaches that we are all “one in Christ” and that in Christ there is “neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28).

Now for the troubling irony: seeking to control or limit the applicability of the, “What did women do?” passages by appealing to the silencing passages illustrates the fall, not the new creation. When men seek to control women by silencing them permanently in the church, we stand face-to-face with a contradiction of the very thing the new creation is designed to accomplish: to undo the fall. What we see in this desire to silence women is the desire to rule over women, a desire that pertains to the fall, not to the new creation. What the Spirit does when the Spirit is present is to release and liberate humans from their fallen condition so that God’s will can be completely done. The Spirit creates mutuality. Always.

A Brief Reminder

So, when we come upon the two silencing passages, we need to learn to read them out of the story of the Bible. We need to remind ourselves of this:

women in the Old Testament exercised servant leadership; women in the Old Testament spoke for God as prophets;
women in the New Testament era were gifted by God’s Spirit for such things as teaching and servant leadership;
and new creation begins to undo the fall, which means that men and women are drawn back into being “one” in Christ.

Even if the Bible’s “what did women do?” actions by women were exceptional instead of the norm, God has always raised up women with such gifts. Someone could explain the Old Testament “What did women do?” passages as exceptions to the norm, but there’s more going on than exceptions in the New Testament. Something new is happening with women in the New Testament.

Another Important But Overlooked Passage

One of the most significant passages about women in church ministries is often ignored. The plot in the Bible’s story reveals that the messianic era would release the Spirit so that *women would also be gifted to exercise prophecy and servant leadership in the churches*. When the Spirit fell upon the Pentecostal assembly, including Mary and other women, Peter said:

This is what was spoken by the prophet
Joel: “In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see
visions, your old men will
dream dreams.

Even on my servants, *both men and women*,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and *they will prophesy.*” (Acts 2:16–18, emphasis added)

Pentecost was the day the music of the fall died and the day new creation music began to be sung. Acts 2 makes it clear that something big and something new was happening, and that bigness and that newness included women. Pentecost, so the Bible tells us, leads us to think of an *increase* in women’s capacities to minister, not a decrease. Women’s ministries *expand* as the Bible’s plot moves forward; they do not shrink. Many today have shrunk the role of women in ministries, and when that happens, it flat-out contradicts the direction the Bible is asking us to move.

We must return to the point made in the previous chapters. We must ask, “what did women do?” We must ask about how the Story of God moves forward in the Bible. This kind of Bible reading means that when we read about women being silenced in Paul, you and I are drawn into a decision. Either we see Paul contradicting the way God has used women in the rest of the Bible or we are being asked to see the silence as a special kind of silence. That is the point we will sketch out for both 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:8–15.

Women at Corinth

The reason some believe in silencing women begins with 1 Corinthians 14:34–35.² Here are Paul’s words:

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Knowing what we know from our “what did women do?” reading about the role of women in the early churches, we are surprised that Paul would say “women should remain silent in the churches.” Furthermore, Paul himself gives instructions on women prophesying in the churches in this same letter to the Corinthians. One can’t prophesy (or pray) in public and remain completely silent; prophesying means talking in public! In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul says this about women in public church gatherings: “But every woman who *prays or prophesies* with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is the same as having her head shaved” (11:5, emphasis added). And we know from the book of Acts that women exercised the gift of prophecy in the churches. Peter saw this as a fulfillment of the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17–18; 21:9).

So, yes, we are surprised by the sudden appearance of a command for silence for women. Many of us, when reading these words about silence after we have absorbed the rest of the biblical witness, ask this: If women did what we have already seen they did throughout scripture, and if Paul offers clear directions on how women should exercise their gift of prophecy in public gatherings, how can he suddenly say women should “remain silent”? Has he not contradicted himself? How do we explain 1 Corinthians 14?

Many biblical scholars today believe that Paul’s silencing of women is a *special kind of silencing*. In other words, Paul is not totally silencing women; that would contradict his own teaching. We are not completely sure what kind of special silence he has in mind, so let us sketch three options. Some think Paul prohibits women from *evaluating prophecies*. Others think Paul is asking women to be silent when it comes to *speaking in or interpreting tongues*, another special concern in this passage. The third option comes from Craig Keener, an expert scholar on the historical background to the New Testament, who keenly observes that Paul’s own words clarifies this best. Paul silences women in regard to *asking questions*: “If they want to *inquire about something*, they should ask their own husbands [if they are married] at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak [inquire about something they don’t yet understand] in the church.”

Why would Paul restrict the asking of questions? The best answer is because these women were not yet educated theologically or biblically as well as the men. When these women heard what was being said, they had questions. Paul thinks those sorts of questions should be asked elsewhere, probably because it interrupted the service. This conclusion has significant implications. Paul's silencing of women at Corinth is then only a *temporary* silencing. Once the women with questions had been educated, they would be permitted then to ask questions in the gatherings of Christians.

An implication of Paul's statements is the responsibility of Christian men and leaders to educate women, and this would have stood out in the ancient world as a progressive ideal. As Keener states it, Paul "supports learning before speaking." He adds that such an educational process would not "prohibit women in very different cultural settings from speaking God's word." Furthermore, we must pay special attention to the fact that women today are not uneducated — in fact, some male pastors are! This passage testifies to the importance of education — of knowing the Bible and theology and having pastoral gifts and skills — and once those basics are met, anyone with gifts should be encouraged to use their gifts.

Women at Ephesus

Because Paul's instruction for the elders in Ephesus (note that Timothy was in Ephesus when Paul wrote this letter to him; see 1 Timothy 1:3) to silence women is used by some to silence women, and because others think such a view is politically incorrect, the passage has itself been silenced by both sides! The fuller context of the passage is below.

Modesty: 1 Timothy 2:9-10

I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

First, Paul expects the women to whom he is speaking to dress modestly; by that he means they are not to dress elaborately or seductively and are to focus their attention on "good deeds." The reason for this has to do with the respectability of the gospel and the church, and Paul is concerned with the influence of the new Roman women who threatened the reputation of the gospel.

Learning before Teaching: 1 Timothy 2:11-12

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Second, Paul expects women first to learn in quietness and full submission to those who know, and only then does he say they are not to teach or exercise authority. *Learning* women — and this now sounds like 1 Corinthians 14 —

are to "be quiet." Paul does not say that women are always to sit in the learning posture and never to be teachers; he does not say they are forever to remain silent, for that would contradict the known practices of the early churches.

Adam and Eve: 1 Timothy 2:13-14

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Third, in these two verses Paul anchors the silencing of unlearned women in two points: (1) Adam was "formed first" and (2) Eve was first to be deceived. These two statements surprise the reader. It is entirely possible Paul is responding to Roman women. These "new Roman women" could have been claiming that the gender order should be reversed, with women subordinating men, and that the original creation was first females and then males.

We cannot be sure why Paul says what he says here. However one interprets these verses—and let's be honest enough to say they are difficult—if we make them an inflexible rule that women should always be silent, we have a flat-out contradiction to the Story of the Bible, to the practices of Priscilla and Junia and Phoebe, and to Paul himself. It seems that Paul is responding to, and refuting, the claims of “new Roman women” that women were superior to men.

Childbearing and Salvation: 1 Timothy 2:15

But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Fourth, Paul continues to say that if women — and here he is speaking to married women — continue in the faith, they will be “saved through childbearing.” Once again, no one knows for certain what this verse means. Many today think the verse has something to do with the new Roman women's avoidance of marriage while others also suggest that he is responding to the growing attraction on the part of the “new Roman women” to terminate their pregnancies. If this is so, we may have an allusion to abortion in the New Testament.

Paul discerns that these Christian (and married) women need to know that being married and being mothers are worthy vocations for women. Paul is not advocating that all women must be married.

