

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry

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I (Nijay Gupta) have been an egalitarian for over 15 years. So, I am definitely long overdue for expressing my views in an extended, written format. There will be a large number of posts in this series, so stay tuned.

Starting from the beginning

Before getting into biblical and theological arguments and views, I thought it would be appropriate to talk about my story.

I became a believer as a teenager. In college (at a secular university), I was involved with Campus Crusade for Christ and the Navigators. I went to a conservative evangelical (non-denominational) church. In those years, I started to read books by theologians and Christian leaders—C. S. Lewis, Max Lucado, Dallas Willard, Jerry Bridges, Ravi Zacharias and especially John Piper (this was the '90's!). I did not have a very well thought out view of what women should or should not do in ministry. Either I had never seen or heard of a woman pastor, or I assumed anyone associated with such views just didn't take the Bible very seriously.

I subscribed to what I call "package theology." If I found a scholar convincing in one area of theology, then they must be "right" in all areas—hence, I bought their "package." So with Piper, I liked his writings on glorifying God, I liked his work on missions, so I took his whole package, which includes a strict view that men alone ought to lead churches. (I was so enamored with Piper that I once drove 14 hours from southern Ohio to Dallas to hear Piper preach at Dallas Theological Seminary.)

And yet, even in my college days, there were a few things that contradicted or challenged some of my assumptions about women in leadership. First, there was an amazing staff leader with Campus Crusade named Jane Armstrong. Everyone who knew her respected her deeply; she was and is wise, godly, mature, caring, and competently led many men and women on missions trips (including myself). But, in Crusade's leadership system, she could never be the campus director because she is a woman. She could be an associate campus director (which she was), but a man must be the director. (That is what I had heard.) But why?

A second thing during that time stuck with me. When I went home in the summers, I would help out with my home church, and I did an internship there as well. My church believed that women were not allowed to be "pastors." But there was a female director of children's ministry on staff. She was very wise, much beloved in the community, and she went on the "pastors' retreat" every year (I know that because as an intern I went once as well). For all intents and purposes, she was indeed a "pastor." But the church used a terminology loophole to maintain what they considered a biblical view.

It wasn't until I attended seminary that I really took a hard look at the issue of women in ministry. I went to Gordon-Conwell where there were faculty on both sides of the debate. To be perfectly honest, I was still staunchly complementarian my first year of seminary. In fact, I wrote my first systematic theology paper on this (self-chosen topic): "Why Women Shouldn't Be Pastors." (I got an "A" on the paper, btw). But in my second year of seminary, I went through a long journey of thinking and study that led me to the opposite conclusion. So I wrote my final (3rd year) systematic theology paper on this subject: "Why Women Should Be Pastors" (I also got an "A" on that one!)

What changed my mind? It wasn't one single thing. Rather, it was the erosion of the false confidence I had in my complementarian view. Almost all of the assumptions I had about the key biblical texts

were not as secure as I had assumed, once I dug into the academic discussions. Furthermore, I continued to meet and become aware of respected evangelical scholars who supported women in ministry (people like Walter Kaiser, Gordon Fee, Howard Marshall, and F. F. Bruce). This started to disassemble that Piper “package” I had once bought into. Thirdly, I got to know some evangelical women scholars who supported women in ministry (esp. Catherine Kroeger, for whom I eventually served as a research assistant), and to my surprise, they were wonderful, conservative, Bible-loving, God-honoring scholars.

In my experience, people do not often change their mind just by reading biblical scholarship—although the exegesis matters greatly. Rather, for me, I was stuck on trying to ponder the rationale and logic of male-only pastors. We all know incredibly gifted women who are highly competent to serve as leaders (I’m married to one!). If anyone ever tells you, “do this, because the Bible says so,” but they can’t explain why, that is bad theology and ethics.

So that is the beginning of my story. More to come; next up...”Setting the Table: Terms and Translations.”

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 2

Translation and Terms: The Devil is in the Details

I am being honest when I say, one of the most important things I did to help me understand the “women in ministry” issue was: learn Greek and Hebrew. (And I took advanced Greek, advanced Hebrew, Classic and Ecclesiastical Latin, Aramaic, and Akkadian for good measure.)

Why?

So many people over the years had said to me: just read your Bible and the answer is clear. By this, they mean that there are many “clear” passages that forbid women from being pastors or preachers. But here is the problem: “translators are liars” (so the famous proverb goes). That is not a cop-out. Bible translators have to simplify texts to communicate clearly, but all along the way they make lots of little choices, and they have to “take sides” on issues even if the answer isn’t fully clear. So, my house of cards began to collapse when I was confronted with many translation issues. For example

Was Phoebe (Rom 16:1; diakonos) a “servant” (KJV), “deacon” (NIV), or “deaconess” (RSV)? Keep in mind Paul used diakonos for himself (1 Cor 3:5) and Christ (Rom 15:8), and it can also be translated “minister.”

When Paul calls women to be “silent,” is the issue one of lack of words, or is it about respect, peace, and harmony in the church? The verb sigao refers to being quiet, but it can be used in reference to quiet or still waters (LXX Ps 107:29). In Exodus, Moses instructs the Israelites crossing the river that “The Lord will fight for you, and you will be quiet” (LXX Exodus 14:14 NETS). Is Moses concerned with silence? No, so most translations of the Hebrew and Septuagint text prefer the language of peace or stillness.

Then we have the issue of “ordination” and “pastors” and “preaching.” There is little in the New Testament that lays out the specifications of ordination (see 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). As for “pastors,” this does not appear to me to be a dominant “office” in the first century. In Acts, Paul tells the Ephesians “elders” that the Spirit had made them overseers of the church, to shepherd the people (20:28). Paul mentions pastors/shepherds briefly in Ephesians 4:11. Aside from that, we know very little about “pastors” and their responsibilities. To say a woman cannot be a “pastor” is to place some construct on the Bible that is not explicitly there. We know far more about what Paul thinks about

bishops than about pastors. As for “preaching” (i.e., “women cannot preach”), the NT says virtually nothing about sermons and what we think of as preaching (i.e., Bible lessons for the church). The language of preaching (kerusso, kerygma) in the NT is almost always about the proclamation of the gospel. And if rocks are qualified to do this (Luke 19:40), I can’t imagine women wouldn’t be.

Now, I am fine with modern ordination, and pastors, and elders, and preaching, but we must be cognizant of the fact that we sometimes read our modern assumptions about church practices back into the Bible. That is dangerous!

So, a crucial part of my journey was knowing what is and is not actually in the Bible, and seeing the complex, but beautiful Greek text which begs careful study. We will try to do some of that careful study, but for now I want to just reinforce the notion that it is misleading to say: The answer is clear in MY Bible. That usually means: The answer is clear in MY FAVORITE ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

Recently I heard Tish Harrison Warren say that whether you are egalitarian or complementarian, you can only be about 80% sure you are right. I think Warren is right. Scripture offers so many pieces of this puzzle to analyze, and it is really hard to put it all together. It is a beautiful mess, but it is anything but 100% clear to anyone.

In later posts, I will dig into particular texts, church roles, and questions about gender and leadership. I am not trying to throw everything out the window when I say that looking at the Greek makes things messy. I just want to emphasize that the first step in anyone’s journey on this issue must include intellectual humility and a sober recognition that the textual and hermeneutical issues are complex, especially when you look at the text in the original languages.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 3

Starting with Deborah

In many cases, to address the matter of women in ministry, scholars begin with Genesis. But I prefer to begin with Deborah. Why? For me, she makes all the difference. That is because this one case study in Scripture overturns virtually all arguments against women church leaders. (In 2012 I wrote a blog on some of the details in Judges 4-5, FYI)

But—women are not gifted in leadership. Deborah was.

Women belong in the home sphere. Deborah was called to lead a nation.

Women should focus on supporting their husband. Deborah alone was judge over Israel.

Men should have final say. Read the book of Judges. Men do and say some really dumb stuff. A lot.

The reason I start with Deborah is because, when people say that women shouldn’t be pastors, preachers, elders, or leaders, they must explain why this is so. They must reason out what exactly disqualifies women. (It is not enough to say, “the Bible says so.” Even if it did, Christians are thinking and reasoning people; we need to know why we make the ethical decisions we commit to.)

History tells a long story of men depicting women as too emotional, too weak, too stupid, or gullible. (Case in point: in a 1995 essay, Thomas Schreiner portrayed women as more susceptible to deception, but in a revised 2005 edition, that argument was removed. See documentation at the end of this blog.) That was pretty much the main rationale for no women leaders until the late 1970s and 1980s. With the rise of women CEOs, women scholars, and women politicians, it became thoroughly unreasonable

to put men a cut above women in leadership or intellect. So, the argument again women shifted to “gender roles” and “gender spheres.” It was unsustainable for complementarians to urge that women were mentally or emotionally unqualified to lead. Rather, the argument shifted to focus on the proper place for women—as supporters of other women, and caretakers of home and children. (This shift of argument is well-documented in Alan Padgett’s book, *As Christ Submits to the Church*.)

So, for many complementarians, the ideal woman is a good mother, a submissive wife, and a supporter of children and other women in a church context. If there is a clear boundary line for complementarians, it is that women absolutely cannot carry out executive authority over a man (based largely on their reading of 1 Tim 2).

And yet, Deborah does just that. She

- “was leading Israel” as prophet (4:4)
- served as judge over Israel by “holding court” (4:5)
- speaks firmly to Barak the command of the Lord (4:6) (note that she summoned for him, he didn’t ask for her)
- commands Barak to attack Sisera (4:14)
- Some have argued Deborah was not a real “judge,” because it doesn’t say she was “raised up.” But the Song of Deborah makes this pretty clear: “in the days of Shamgar...the highways were abandoned; travelers took winding paths. Villagers in Israel would not fight; they held back until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel” (5:6-7).

There have been all kinds of rebuttals against seeing Deborah as an example of female executive authority over men. Here is how I would respond.

Wasn’t she used by God because no man could be found willing to lead? If you read Judges, there are hardly any good men at all, and yet Gideon and Samson are considered “judges.”

Wasn’t she just a prophet, representing God? She was a prophet, but she was also more. Prophets (alone) don’t “hold court” in Israel.

Did she really have authority over men? 4:5 is pretty clear that all kinds of Israelites went to Deborah to have their cases and disputes resolved by her. If it were just women, I am sure the text would have made this clear. Also, see below what Ambrose writes about this matter, because he was convinced she was the sole executive leader over all Israel, over women and men.

So, let me state again that I bring up Deborah first because she busts so many myths about whether or not women are capable of executive ministry; and it demonstrates that Scripture blesses and honors her ministry. She is the only positive (developed) character in Judges.

Women can lead. Women did lead. They did it well. They sometimes did it alone. They prophesied. They commanded. They spoke the Word of the Lord. They warned. And they sang victory songs.

Before you say or hear someone say, But women aren’t good at/women aren’t wired for/women struggle with—filter it through the Deborah test. If Deborah did it, don’t make it a genderized limitation. I think men and women have differences, but capacity for leadership isn’t one of them. I am lucky to have had many incredible women mentors, colleagues, leaders, and pastors in my life, all who demonstrated extraordinary leadership skills.

I would like to end this post with an extended quote from Ambrose, bishop of Milan (340-397). Ambrose talks here about Deborah as a model of courageous leadership. It reminds me that even

many centuries ago Deborah was recognized for her incredible leadership. (I have put in bold certain lines I felt were especially poignant)

For [Deborah] showed not only that widows have no need of the help of a man, inasmuch as she, not at all restrained by the weakness of her sex, undertook to perform the duties of a man, and did even more than she had undertaken. And, at last, when the Jews were being ruled under the leadership of the judges, because they could not govern them with manly justice or defend them with manly strength, and so wars broke out on all sides, they chose Deborah, by whose judgment they might be ruled. And so one widow both ruled many thousands of men in peace and defended them from the enemy. There were many judges in Israel, but no woman before was a judge, as after Joshua there were many judges but none was a prophet. And I think that her judgeship has been narrated and her deeds described, that women should not be restrained from deeds of valor by the weakness of their sex. A widow, she governs the people; a widow, she leads armies; a widow, she chooses generals; a widow, she determines wars and orders triumphs. So, then, it is not nature which is answerable for the fault or which is liable to weakness. It is not sex but valor which makes strong.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 4

Image of God, Male and Female

It's time to look at Genesis 1 and 2. I used to think that it made a big difference that woman was created after man, and that she was created to be a "helper" to man. But, as Lucy Peppiatt reminded me (in her soon coming book, which is excellent), this is one way of interpreting the creation story, but it is not the only way. Before we get to some of these gender issues, I just want to make a few notes about Genesis 1 and 2.

Genesis 1

This is a grand narrative of the incredible act of God to fashion a good and beautiful world: light, day and night, waters, sky, land and greenery, sun, moon, and stars, sea creatures and birds (1:1-20); and the command for all things to produce abundance (1:21-25).

In 1:26, adam (human) does not mean "Adam," nor does it mean "man/male." We know that because it switches immediately from adam (singular) to "they" (plural), implying that adam stands for human, male and female. This seems fuzzy in 1:26, but becomes more clear in 1:27 when they are defined as "them: male and female." They are created in God's own image, which means they are like him in special ways that are not true of other creatures. Presumably, this relates to their unique ability to rule (wisely?) over all the creatures of the world. This is said twice, in 1:26 and 1:28.

If all we had was Genesis 1, we would naturally assume men and women were equals, partners and co-rulers on earth as the image of God. There is not a whiff of headship, male-leadership, or "gender roles" here. Put another way, if the dinosaurs had questions, they wouldn't necessarily go to Adam first and foremost.

Genesis 2

This second account clearly goes back and re-tells parts of the creation story in a bit of a different way. We are given more details about the actual formation of the man (2:7). He is made from earth. Man is given work in the Garden, he must care for it (2:15). But he is warned not to eat from the special tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:16-17). (A bit of foreshadowing—woman is not made yet, and had not received this command first hand as far as we know.)

So then, God formed animals and saw whether they might work as helpers for Adam (2:20). “Helpers” to do what? We are not told, but either it means those who would tend the Garden (from 2:15), or to help rule the earth (from 1:26-27).

Let us not get tripped up on the word “helper” (2:18, 20). This word (*ezer*) does not mean “assistant,” but neither does it mean “savior.” “Helper” is actually a good neutral word: someone who helps someone else. If my car breaks down and I have to push it to the side of the road, I need help, someone else to share the work.

When Genesis says that woman was made from man’s rib, that does not mean she is derivative, but simply means she is like him (bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh). She is not less than him, she is human like him. He is not superior in any way because he was made first. (Otherwise, why were humans made last in Genesis 1?) He clearly needed help with his vocation, and God created woman to partner in the work. Nothing from Genesis 2 clearly establishes headship, female submission, or unique male leadership. In fact, quite the opposite, man is not commanded to lead or guide woman; he is “united” to her (2:24) and they become one.

The Big Picture

When I read Genesis 1 and 2, here is what I think these chapters are communicating about humans.

- A Unified Species: The first mention of human(s) is 1:26, and they are treated as one thing, a unified species, made in the image of God and created to co-rule.
- Two Types: From 1:27, the clear addition is there are two types, male and female.
- Man needs help: In 2:18, it is made clear Adam can’t do this work alone, he needs help.
- Woman helps man: The animals cannot suffice, so woman is created from man to show her fitness for helping him.
- I can see no clear Creation signals that man is given special command to rule or serve as leader over woman. Quite the contrary, he is seen as incomplete and lacking without her. That doesn’t make her superior. Presumably she needs him as much as he needs her, but all in all everything is considered very good because there is the possibility of these two being united as one.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 5

The Undoing (Genesis 3)

In this series, I want to spend some time on Genesis 3, popularly known as “the Fall.” I think that terminology is inaccurate. Falling is not imagery used here. Closer to what we see happen in this chapter, I like to call it the “undoing” of God’s good work in creation. All that beauty, innocence, harmony, and unity is undone.

The first thing to notice with Genesis 3:1 is that the problem seems to come out of the middle of nowhere. This serpent appears on the scene with a dastardly agenda. He succeeds in sowing the seed of doubt in the mind of Eve (3:3-4). But, what is worse, Eve gives into temptation and seeks to “be like God” (3:5) in her knowledge of good and evil. She believed it would give her special or divine wisdom such that she could be independent of God (3:6). Adam is not absent, but joins in this rebellion (3:6). So they hide and are ashamed when their eyes are finally opened (3:7-9).

Their reaction isn’t to revel in their newfound wisdom. When they are confronted by God, they immediately cast blame. Man blames woman (3:12) and woman blames the serpent (3:13). Conscience and integrity or undone. All this back-stabbing and division unravel God’s work of

establishing unity and abundance. And God's words of judgment further underscore the frustration of creation's fecundity.

A key verse here in terms of gender roles is 3:16 where God says: "and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Jewish Publication Society). This is a pretty good "literal" translation of the Hebrew, but what does it mean? Well, it seems obvious (to most) that man "ruling" over woman is a problem, not a blessing. This verb is about absolute authority over someone, like a king ruling a subject (Gen 4:7; Gen 37:8). The Creation accounts do not call for man to rule over woman; she helps him and they co-rule over the creatures together.

A more difficult interpretive issue is what it means that her "desire" will be towards her husband. What kind of desire? Love? Sexual feelings? The Hebrew word itself is neutral; it simply means passions or longings. It could be good, like deep love. But it can also be destructive passions, like malice. The ESV 2016 translates this as "your desire shall be contrary to your husband." This has been largely rejected by scholars. The NET translates this as "You will want to control your husband." I think this is close. I would translate this (in paraphrase) as, "you will desire to undermine your husband."

Old Testament scholar Richard Hess interprets the text in this way:

The woman's "desire" for her husband is not primarily sexual desire. In accordance with basic principles of interpretation, one finds this rare word, *teshuqah*, nearby in Genesis 4:7, where it refers to sin's "desire" to control Cain. The same verb, "to rule, master, " *mashal*, describes both the man's domination of the woman and Cain's ability to dominate sin. Thus the woman will desire to dominate the man but the man, perhaps with superior strength, will dominate the woman. However, this is a judgment of how things will be, not necessarily how they must be. The patriarchal societies of the world express the reality of male domination...[T]he emphasis here is on the terrible effects of sin, and the destruction of a harmonious relationship that once existed. In its place comes a harmful struggle of wills.

One can see the reality of this "undoing" in Genesis 3, and it gets worse until the call of Abram (Gen 12). Does Genesis 3 teach that men must lead and women must follow? No, we see hope in Adam and Eve joining together as one flesh, and it is Eve who has the final word as she praises God for blessing them with a child.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 6

Thinking about Patriarchy

Soon, I will be jumping from Genesis 3 to the New Testament. I have already talked about Deborah, and I think she busts the assumptions we have about the empowerment and competency of women in the Old Testament. Also, I need to do a lot of work in the New Testament with key texts, so we will commence with Jesus and women.

But before looking at texts in the New Testament, it is vitally important to address the matter of patriarchy in the Bible.

Is Patriarchy "Biblical"?

Put simply, patriarchy is the idea that a (certain) society revolves around men and their leadership. In patriarchal societies, men are the leaders and decision-makers, and women play a supporting role. It would be foolish to argue that Jesus did not live in a patriarchal society. Israel had kings. Israel had

male priests. Jesus had male disciples. The lives of men dominate the pages of the entire Bible. Everyone agrees on that. But “what is” is not always “what should be.” Just because something happens in Scripture, doesn’t mean that is the way it ought to be. Jesus makes this clear when he allows divorce, but points out that it is a concession, not a new standard (Matt 19:8).

This is where I teach my students about the ideas of progressive revelation and divine accommodation. Progressive revelation means that God does not reveal his full will all at once, but allows it to unfold over time. In the middle of the story, we cannot expect to see what the fullness of new creation looks like (so 2 Cor 4:17).

Divine accommodation means that God might use already existing systems to communicate his revelation in culturally familiar concepts because He has a long term plan to move towards complete redemption. So, for example, Scripture refers to the “four corners” of the earth (Isa 11:12), even though the actual world is spherical. God was communicating partially within existing thought structures, even if they were not factually correct.

I think this matters when we look at ongoing elements of patriarchy in the Bible. Yes, it is part of the reality of life in Antiquity. So, we have male priests, male kings, and male disciples. But scholars like William Webb have wisely called us to look for pointers in Scripture to what it ought to be like. Even in the midst of a patriarchal world, one that I admit Jesus doesn’t condemn explicitly, we catch glimpses of a “men and women together in leadership” vision. One where “sons and daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17).

I believe the fact of Scripture itself deconstructs patriarchy. The Church and the Spirit together embedded the voices of both men and women in Holy Scripture (e.g., women like Miriam, Hannah, and Mary), transforming their words into the Word of God for the people of God. This permanently overturns patriarchy’s silencing of women, and empowers these women to be inspired and authoritative teachers for all and for all times.

I believe when we disarm patriarchy and move towards amphiarchy (shared leadership), we honor the symphony of Scripture and reflect the ideal unified calling of men and women to care for God’s world together.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 7

Marvelous Mary

I’m not Catholic, but I have learned to pay close attention to Mary in the Gospels from my Catholic friends. She should be respected as the mother of Jesus, but she is also an example of great faith in the Gospels, a disciple in her own right, and she even becomes a matriarch of the early church (I will explain that one later).

Yes, Jesus had an earthly father, but the spotlight of the Gospels tends to be on Mary.

Preacher of the Gospel

I believe it was Joel Green and F. Scott Spencer who really opened my eyes to the beauty and power of Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), where she previews the gospel with deeply impactful words. I consider it the most inspiring articulation of the gospel in the whole Bible. Recently I had a discussion on social media where several men argued that her song is not “preaching,” it is just a song, an expression of worship. But we must not forget that there is no Greek word for “preach a sermon.” That is because the New Testament doesn’t talk about sermons. When the Bible talks about “preaching,” it

refers to the public proclamation of the gospel and its implications. Mary certainly does that. In fact, the Magnificat almost serves as pre-narration of the entire gospel of Luke. Ephrem the Syrian referred to Mary as preacher of the new kingdom (ECTD 56-57).

Teacher of Jesus

We don't know the name of any of Jesus' school teachers or rabbis. We can assume that Jesus was taught about God by his parents (Deut 6:3-9). Joseph does not get much attention in the Gospels, because he probably died before Jesus began his ministry. Jesus would have naturally confided in Mary and turned to her for advice. (In the ancient mediterranean world, adult children took the counsel of their mother and father very seriously. See Gen 27; Lev 19:3; Prov 1:8; 6:20. It is the same way in India today, for example.) We know from the Gospels that Jesus grew in wisdom (Luke 2:52), and you can be sure Mary had much to do with this.

Leader of the Early Church

Mary's story doesn't end with the Gospels. She makes one last appearance (by name) in the book of Acts. According to Luke's testimony of the early church, Mary was present at Pentecost (along with other unnamed women; Acts 1:14). Why does Luke go out of his way in Acts to mention her? There are 11 men named, and then Mary. Many scholars conclude that she is present at the endowing of the Spirit to the Church as a second fulfillment of Luke 1:35. The angel says to Mary, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." Obviously, the primary fulfillment is the conception and birth of Jesus the Messiah. But Mary's presence at Pentecost again demonstrates her faith and courage, and the Spirit again coming down, but here for the conception and birth of the Church. It is no wonder that paintings from many periods place Mary at the center of Pentecost (see below). If you have time, read all about this in Mikeal Parsons and Heidi Hornik's *The Acts of the Apostles through the Centuries*.

So What?

Mary was not a technical "disciple," not a formal "apostle." But she is treasured as a model of faith, a teacher of Jesus, and a wise leader of the church who did not stand in the spotlight. I had a chance to see the famous Pieta (see the features image above) in person about a decade ago. We "see" Mary only here and there in the Gospels, but the Pieta reminds me that she spent thousands of hours with Jesus throughout his life, far more than any man. No one loved Jesus more than Mary. No one grieved his death more painfully than Mary. No one was more deserving to hold his dead body than her. She is one of many reasons why I believe in women in ministry.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 8

Mary Magdalene: Equal to the Apostles

In the last post, I talked about marvelous Mary. There is another important Mary (or Miriam): Mary Magdalene. Contrary to popular assumptions, she was not a prostitute or woman of ill repute. (see [HERE](#) for more information on that.) According to Luke, she was someone Jesus cured from the oppression of seven demons (8:2). Presumably, she was also one of the many women disciples who travelled with Jesus and financially supported his ministry out of her funds (8:3).

Mary's importance in the Jesus tradition should not be underestimated. She is mentioned by name and appears in the Passion Narratives in all four Gospels. That means her presence and importance has staying power. She was and is remembered as a uniquely loyal and faith-filled disciple.

According to Matthew, Mary Magdalene (and another Mary) go to the tomb, and are greeted by an angel who announces to them the resurrection of Jesus (Matt 28:7). Filled with faith, they left with joy ready to tell the disciples (28:8). Then Jesus himself greets them and they hold his feet and worship him (28:9). There is no fear or doubt, only joy and worship. Jesus, the risen Lord, could very well have disappeared and met the other disciples himself. But Jesus commands the women: “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (28:10).

Luke tells us that while the women were faithful to their task, the male disciples doubted (Luke 24:10). We often fixate on the leadership of the church as the male 12 (or 11), “the disciples,” and “the apostles.” We know these men had their flaws—Peter denied, Thomas doubted, John bragged about being a faster runner (!). But these women were incredibly brave. NT Wright calls Mary Magdalene apostle to the apostles. The Orthodox tradition hails Mary as isapostolos – equal to the apostles. If the qualifications for apostle were that the person was with Jesus during his ministry, witnessed his resurrection life, and was sent to proclaim to others “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18), then equal to the apostles she is.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 9

Wise Priscilla

Married Couple Saints In Scripture Priscilla and Aquila connected with Paul via their shared occupation of tent-making (Acts 18:1-3). Not only does this couple appear in Luke’s Acts, but they are also mentioned by Paul in Romans. He calls them “co-workers in Christ Jesus,” which was his way of designating ministry colleagues. Paul goes as far as saying they (both of them) “risked their lives for me” such that all Gentile Christians are in their debt (Rom 16:4).

I hear from theologians and pastors from time to time that (1) women are capable of good leadership, but (2) the Bible expressly forbids women teaching men on theological or biblical matters (supposedly based on 1 Tim 2:11-14; we will get to that text later). But Priscilla seems to be a direct example of a woman teaching a man.

Luke refers to the Christian Apollos (an Alexandrian Jew) as a “learned man” who had already studied the Bible in depth (Acts 18:24). One might say that he went to Bible college and seminary. He was passionate about the gospel and “taught about Jesus accurately,” though he had a limited understanding of baptism (18:25). He was an evangelist and missionary, sharing the gospel in the Jewish synagogue.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preach, they wanted to teach him more accurately (18:26). We have to stop here and really reckon with how unusual it was at the time for Luke to mention both Priscilla and Aquila. They (both) invited him over and they taught him. So, clearly Priscilla played a crucial role in teaching biblical and theological matters to an already well-trained Christian leader. Some complementarians have refuted this treating it as an irrelevant text for supporting women in ministry teaching roles; here are my counter responses.

Myth 1: Priscilla taught in the home, not the church, so her authority is not ecclesial.

Churches met primarily in homes; here it matters what she does and with whom, not “where” it took place.

Myth 2: She teaches as a private layperson, not a church authority figure.

Paul acknowledges both Priscilla and Aquila as “co-workers,” which tends to mean they were active in what we think of as full-time ministry; they were itinerant Christian leaders, like Paul. Today we might treat them as missionaries. My hunch is Apollos went willingly to receive their teaching precisely because of their ministry reputation.

Myth 3: Priscilla did not have independent authority, but her teaching was legitimized by her husband Aquila.

This myth is an inference, rather than something explicitly stated in Acts. It is true Priscilla did not privately or independently teach Apollos. Still, the most holistic vision for ministry is neither one where men teach alone or women teach alone, but men and women teach the whole people of God together.

Sometimes the matter is raised that Priscilla’s name is given before Aquila on some occasions. This is true, but it is unclear what this signals. Is it her primary role in the teaching? Perhaps. Is it that she had higher social status than Aquila? Possibly. I am not sure. But I am sure that this was a deeply respected ministry couple in the early church. She was not his assistant. She did not just work with women. She was present and active in the early mission of the gospel and we owe both Priscilla and Aquila our deepest gratitude for their faith and faithfulness as missionaries and teachers.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 10

Why Translation Matters (ἄνθρωπος/anthropos doesn't mean "man/men")

Periodically, I will offer some translation notes in this blog series. Today, I want to point out how many modern translations default to androcentrism (a "male" orientation where it is unnecessary). I will focus my concern on the ESV, because of its popularity and its dominance in many evangelical churches.

According to most reputable lexicons, anthropos means "person/human," without any specific assumption of gender. I would guess that 99% of the time, anthropos is used in the New Testament in this generic way. There are a small number of occasions, where anthropos is used as a clear reference to a man (and, thus, as a synonym for aner, "male").

Translations like the ESV often render anthropos as "man" even though nothing in the context suggests this gendered limitation. Here are a few examples.

ESV Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (anthropos), who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (Rom. 1:18 ESV)

Note: Here the wrath of God is against all of sinful humanity, not just men. In fact, women are mentioned in 1:26. Therefore, it makes more sense to translate this as humanity or humankind.

ESV Romans 2:16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men (anthropos) by Christ Jesus. (Rom. 2:16 ESV)

Note: God will judge all people according to Paul, not just men.

ESV 1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men (anthropos) and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Cor. 13:1 ESV)

Note: Because the comparison is with angels (not women), I believe anthropos is best translated as "mortals" or "humans"

ESV Galatians 1:11 For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's (anthropos) gospel. (Gal. 1:11 ESV)

Note: The use of "man" as a representative of "humankind" is rapidly falling out of use in modern English.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men (anthropos plural), the man (anthropos) Christ Jesus, (1 Tim. 2:5 ESV)

Note: Here the mediation is not between God and male humans, but between God and mortals. It obscures the text to refer to Christ Jesus as a "man" here. Otherwise, it potentially elevates men over women. The point is the incarnation (Jesus becoming human flesh). Now the NIV2011 has "man" here (presumably because it sounds more natural), but I think in some cases gender-neutral clarity (when the wording requires it) supersedes the desire for more eloquent speech.

ESV Hebrews 5:1 For every high priest chosen from among men (anthropos) is appointed to act on behalf of men (anthropos) in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. (Heb. 5:1 ESV)

Note: Again, I think the ESV obscures the text by rendering anthropos as "men" here. If the author wanted to say "males" he could have easily done so (with aner). But we must allow the NT authors to make their own point, and not presume what that was by being more specific than they chose to be. Yes, high priests were men, but that is simply not what the author wrote. Even though some argue "not much is lost" here, it becomes a sloppy way of translating, especially when the ESV claims to be an "optimal" equivalence.

ESV Hebrews 7:28 For the law appoints men (anthropos) in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. (Heb. 7:28 ESV)

Note: Again here, the ESV over-interprets the text. The point of the passage is not that "men" become high priests, but that one human becomes high priest and also suffers from weakness; but the Son is unique and perfect

What Do Women Think?

My guess is that the ESV translation committee would find "man/men" a suitable gender-inclusive term, and women feel quite comfortable allowing for this. But there are two problems with this. First, there is so much overt and latent sexism and androcentrism in society, I think we need to be more careful about gender inclusive language (in conversation and in translation where relevant). Secondly, the ESV oversight committee is 12 men. (LINK).

There are ~50 actual translators—all men. To me, this is a major problem if we expect more than half the church (women) to find this translation meaningful and respectful of the inclusion of women.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 11

Is "Headship" Relevant to Women in Ministry Leadership? (1 Cor 11:2-16)

In these blog posts, my overall focus is on why I support women as church leaders, including preaching and teaching for the whole body. I don't think 1 Corinthians 11 has much to say one way or another about women as pastors and preachers, but it comes up enough in conversations about "headship" and "submission" that I thought it deserves discussion.

What is Headship?

It is important to acknowledge that the term "headship" is not in the Bible. It is a construct that is used to talk about gender relationships and power dynamics. But in 1 Cor 11, the language of "head" is important. According to conventional definitions, "headship" refers to the authority of the husband over the wife, and the expected submission of the wife to the husband. Sometimes, it is extrapolated out to men/women relationships in church and society. Our goal here is to see if the head language in this passage carries this authority dynamic, and then if this bars women from leadership in church ministry.

It would take a whole book to give this text the attention it needs for a clear and complete exposition, but I want these posts to be "readable." So, I will offer my brief thoughts, and then I commend the commentaries of Fee (NICNT), Garland (BECNT), and Thiselton (NIGTC) as good sources for all the details.

11:3: A "Head" Taxonomy

At first glance, it seems as if Paul is calling women to submit to men as if to say God is head over Christ, Christ over man, and man over woman. There are a number of problems with treating 11:3 as a static hierarchy. Firstly, there are ongoing debates about the concept of eternal submission in the Godhead. Second, Paul would have believed Christ to be authority over both men and women. It is not as if women need to go to men for confession, rather than directly to God. Thirdly—and most importantly, there is vigorous ongoing debate about the meaning of the word "head" (kephale) as it is used metaphorically here. Many scholars contest the notion of head=authority. Others have proposed "source," but that does not seem much likelier. I think scholars like Garland are getting close when they argue for the meaning "prominence" (leaning into the notion of representative). Any and all of these arguments for kephale must explain how Christ is the "head" of man, but not (directly) the "head" of woman. Whatever this means, it cannot mean direct-authority. Paul is clear elsewhere that Christ himself is "head" over the whole church, not just men. I believe, without a clearer understanding of how and why Paul uses head-language in 1 Cor 11, we ought not to rely on "headship" as a dominant gender-theology framework.

What is Going on in Corinth?

From 11:4-7, we can glean that women (or both women and men) were rejecting certain cultural practices of honor, dignity, and respect regarding headcoverings. Paul does not address headcoverings elsewhere, so this must have been a problem unique to Corinth. Paul warns both men and women for disrupting the dignity of the worship service.

Warning to Women

11:7-10 appear to be a targeted warning to women. Women are meant to add to the glory of men. Eve was not made from Adam's body, but Adam from Eve's (11:8). Paul goes on: women shouldn't undermine men, because they were created to help men (as in support, not serve; 11:8). 11:10 is very difficult to translate, let alone interpret. If we render it literally, it says, "For this reason, a woman ought to have authority on her head, because of the angels." But what does that mean? Is Paul referring to her physical head? Or man as head? Why "on" and not "as"? And where do the angels fit

in? We just don't know. If I had to guess, I would think this means that she needs to take responsibility for what she does with her (physical) head—as in covering it out of respect for men and for God (respect, not submission).

Mutuality is Key

If we focus on "headship," we miss Paul's real point in this passage. In the end (and in the Lord), women and men need each other (11:11). Yes, Eve did come from Adam's body, but we also see how (now) men are given life through women's bodies (11:12a). It is not about origins or heads, but ultimately all must respect the supremacy of God (11:12). Headcoverings are not about women knowing their submissive place, but about turning contentiousness into mutuality and cooperation for the sake of the whole (11:16).

Ministry Relevance

Nowhere in this passage does it say that a woman cannot preach. Nowhere does it say if she speaks, her husband must be present and identifiable as her "symbol of authority." And I don't see anything here that prevents women from being elders. I consider this passage irrelevant to the matter of women in ministry. More relevant is 1 Corinthians 14, but we will save that for another post.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 12

Women in the Ancient Jewish Synagogue

When we address the matter of women in ministry in the New Testament, the focus tends to be on evidence for women in leadership roles in the church—and for good reason. But if we zoom out, it is helpful to look at roles that women played in other religious institutions of the time, especially the Jewish synagogues. Most scholars agree that the nature and structure of the Jewish synagogue influenced the formation of the earliest churches (see Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*).

Therefore, I have found it advantageous to examine the roles and titles attributed to Jewish women in the synagogue. This doesn't directly "prove" anything related to Christian churches, but offers a more complete picture of what women could and did do in the ancient world.

Mother of the Synagogue, Elder, Synagogue Ruler

We have inscriptional evidence that women sometimes were called "mother of the synagogue." It has been argued (theoretically) that this was an honorific title, with no administrative function. The meager evidence we have does not make any of this clear, but it is a sensible guess that such "mothers" and "fathers" were wealthy patrons. Even if their wealth played a role in the title, it is hard to imagine they did not exercise strong influence on the synagogue community.

We also know that women were sometimes called "elder." Some argue this could just be the wives of the male elders, but even if that were true (and there is no solid proof either way), the fact they received such an esteemed title surely meant something about their stature. Perhaps the most grandiose title for women that we come across for women is "synagogue ruler."

The ruler of the synagogue (archisynagogos), Rufina, erected a tomb monument to her freeman and servants. (Smyrna, 2nd cent CE; CII 741)

No husband is mentioned here, so it does not seem that her "ruler" status is directly tied to a husband. If we look at the New Testament, synagogue rulers (presumably mostly male) were the leaders and

representatives of the synagogue (Mark 5, 8; Acts 13, 18). The arch* prefix for Greek words involving roles, titles, or occupations imply a sense of leadership or authority over a group (archieus, archipoimenos, archipatriotes, archistrategos).

Female "Father" of the Synagogue

We have one unusual case where a Latin inscription refers to a woman as pateressa—a feminine form of the word father (pater). It stands to reason, especially in this case, she would have had duties parallel to a male synagogue leader (pater). Why else call her pateressa and not mater (mother)?

So what?

I agree so much of this information is speculative and guess work, but when it comes to reconstructing the lives of ancient people (including the early Christians), the evidence is often fragmentary. I do not imagine the church or the synagogue of the first century threw off patriarchy like a coat. But there is ample evidence that in this time period in the Roman world some women, especially wealthy women, were seen out and about doing important things. That does not create an open and shut case for women pastors today, but neither can this material be ignored or discounted. Every bit contributes to a more complete picture of the lives of women in the ancient world.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 13

Should Women Be Silent and Submissive in Church? (1 Cor 14:26-40)

There are, I would say, two primary texts that people use to prevent women from preaching and teaching over men in the church. One of them is 1 Timothy 2, the other is 1 Corinthians 14 (esp vv. 34-35). Here we will address 1 Corinthians 14.

The focus of our attention will be on these matters:

Are women really not allowed to speak? Why? (14:34)

Does the silencing of women relate to a universal standard of submission to men? (14:35)

There's Something Fishy about This Passage...

If you are like me, when you read 1 Cor 14:34-35 you think: this just doesn't sound like Paul. (This seems to contradict his attitude towards women elsewhere; e.g., Phil 4:2-3; Rom 16). Well, you and I are not alone. Some scholars believe it might be an "interpolation." An interpolation is a piece of writing inserted into a text later by someone else. The best way to prove an interpolation theory is to have a later manuscript of 1 Corinthians with the added text, and an earlier manuscript without it. We don't have that kind of evidence in this situation. But we do have some manuscripts that displace 14:34-35 by putting these two verses after 14:40. If 14:34-35 were original to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, why would a scribe move them? There are few cases I know of where a scribe would transfer a passage to somewhere else. So, we are left with two possibilities.

1 Cor 14:34-35 is an interpolation, i.e., not written by Paul, but added by a later scribe who wanted to include a message calling women to be silent and submissive.

OR

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is authentic to 1 Corinthians (i.e., written by Paul), but some scribe(s) found it awkward and felt the need to move it.

Either way, it is a strange matter. For the last decade or so, I defended the second view (#2), but I am becoming more and more persuaded by (#1). Now, I am the last person who is tempted to start cutting stuff out of the Bible. (That is usually a self-serving endeavor.) And in this case, the evidence for interpolation is still not clear enough to merit removing these verses from modern English Bibles. But - I think this matter is highly relevant to the conversation on women in ministry, because we dare not base our attitudes on this subject on a passage where scholars are not clear on its authenticity.

Still, I will do my best below to offer what I think of as the most plausible reading if it is authentic.

Here is a basic overview of the interpolation issues.

Here is information on some of the complex details.

Starting with the Context

This is one of the texts that gets pulled out of context a lot to reinforce female submission in the church. But it is crucial to recognize that 14:26-40 is not about gender roles in the church; it is about harmony in the church. Paul does not want it to be that some people do the talking (i.e., men) and others do the listening (i.e., women). Rather, each believer has something to contribute verbally to edify the whole church (14:26).

Tongues and Prophecy, not Preaching and Teaching

This passage is used as evidence that women shouldn't preach or teach in ministry over men, but the wider context doesn't actually deal with those matters; it deals with prophecy and tongues. Paul supports tongue-speech, but it should be orderly (14:27). The ideal is that there be an interpreter, or else the tongue-speaker should keep quiet so as not to distract others (14:28).

And what about prophecy? Prophets may speak, but believers should weigh their words carefully (14:29). Paul imagines spontaneous works of the Spirit in the midst of the church, but this should not lead to noise and chaos. All can participate in prophesying for mutual encouragement (14:31).

Verse 33 serves as a key summary of his message: "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people" (NIV).

Silent about What?

All scholars are in agreement that Paul was not calling women to be pin-drop silent at all times in church. After all, even in 1 Corinthians, Paul assumes women will prophesy in church in a public manner (1 Cor 11:5). And yet Paul expresses here that they should not speak. It is logical to assume it is a particular kind of speaking in a particular context.

The best clue we have is in 14:35, which can be translated more literally as "If they want to learn about something, they should ask their own husbands at home." In this context, Paul is rebuking women who disrupt the worship service with comments or questions.

It is crucial to catch the tone of 14:36: did the word of God originate with you? Are you the only people it has reached? There is a tone of correction or rebuke here. What these Corinthian women were doing in the church was not asking about the sermon, I assume. They seem to have had a more subversive attitude as if they were harassing or second-guessing the person speaking.

Paul makes it clear at the end of this passage that what matters most is not that women submit to men, but that prophesying and tongue-speech happen "in a fitting and orderly way" (14:40).

Should Women/Wives Submit to Men in Church?

The language of submission is used in this text (14:34), but there is something I hope you didn't miss. Normally, Paul refers to the authority over the one submitting: submit to [so-and-so], but here he does not. So let's not jump to any conclusions. It could be about submitting to God, but sometimes it can refer to submission to a thing, like the Law of God (Rom 8:7). My sense is that here the language of submission relates to respect for the church service, not submission to men in particular. If Paul wanted to say women should submit to men in church, he would have explicitly said so (because nearly always that is how the verb *hypotasso* is used; see, e.g, 1 Cor 16:16).

What Does This Passage Teach about Women in Ministry?

Nothing. Women should respect men when they speak in church. More spontaneous spiritual activity is expected and encouraged, but not at the expense of harmony.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 14

*Translation Matters: The Generic Use of *αὐτός/autos**

This is going to be another post that engages with why Bible translations should be gender inclusive (when the Greek text requires it), and where and why some translations get it wrong. Again, I am going to focus on the ESV because of its popularity.

The following gets a little technical. Sorry, occupational hazard.

*What is *autos*?*

This Greek word is a pronoun that can mean he, she, or it. Pronouns refer back to a given noun (in most cases). Its grammatical gender will match its antecedent (what it is referring back to). When it comes to the use of *autos* in reference to a man or a woman, it will be grammatically masculine in reference to a man, and grammatical feminine in reference to a woman.

*The Generic Use of *αὐτός/autos**

Sometimes Greek uses *autos* in a generic way, where it refers to a person ("the one who/whoever"). Technically, the grammatical gender of *autos* for its generic use is masculine. But it is essential that we understand that this does not require the word to be referring to a male.

The ESV defaults in its use of generic *autos* to English masculine pronouns. There are hundreds of examples of this in the ESV, but I will demonstrate with just a few.

ESV Luke 9:23 And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (Lk. 9:23 ESV)

Here the ESV renders as "him/his" the occurrences of *autos* in this verse.

ESV 1 John 3:24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (1 Jn. 3:24 ESV)

Here again the ESV uses "him" for the generic use of *autos*.

ESV Hebrews 4:10 for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. (Heb. 4:10 ESV)

And again the ESV uses "his" for the generic use of autos.
ESV Justifies Using Male Pronouns for Generic Autos

Here is the ESV explanation for this:

The inclusive use of the generic "he" has also regularly been retained, because this is consistent with similar usage in the original languages and because an essentially literal translation would be impossible without it. In each case the objective has been transparency to the original text, allowing the reader to understand the original on its own terms rather than on the terms of our present-day culture.

The simplistic statement ("this is consistent with similar usage in the original languages") represents a failure to understand autos. And I think I can prove it.

From my own study of autos, I strongly believe there is a generic use of autos for which we do not have a singular pronoun (generic) version in English. In English, we have to use he/she/it. We don't have a gender neutral pronoun for humans ("he/she"). I think it is clear that in Greek, while autos is technically masculine, Greek readers would know that in its generic usage the gender is canceled out by context.

How do I know this?

The Non-Male Use of Generic Autos

There is at least one case in the Greek Bible, where generic autos is used when the speaker is directly speaking to a woman. In that case, it would be unfathomable that the speaker would be trying to convince the listener of something, all the while excluding them from the statement.

John 4:14: Jesus Speaking to the Samaritan Woman

John 4:14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Jn. 4:14 ESV)
ὅς δ' ἂν πίη ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος οὗ ἐγὼ δώσω αὐτῷ, οὐ μὴ διψήσει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὕδωρ ὃ δώσω αὐτῷ γενήσεται ἐν αὐτῷ πηγὴ ὕδατος ἀλλομένου εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. (Jn. 4:14 BGT)
Immediately the woman responds: "Sir, give me this water" (4:15). She readily interprets this as a statement made in relation to her. In such cases, it makes far more sense to translate this in a gender neutral way, rather than presume it must mean "him" because of a rigid view of grammatic gender.

We have a similar situation with John 11:25. This one does not contain autos, but it does use generic grammatical masculine language in Greek ("whoever believes"; ὁ πιστεύων), but it is speech directed at a woman (Martha).

ESV John 11:25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, (Jn. 11:25 ESV)
εἶπεν αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ κἂν ἀποθάνῃ ζήσεται (Jn. 11:25 BGT)

So what, then? So, it makes little sense to use "his/him/he" in contexts where a generic pronoun/article includes or might include women. The ESV is not being "essentially literal" on these

occasions. More accurately, they are operating with a rigid and limited understanding of grammatical gender and the delicacy of taking context into consideration for generic statements.

Most modern translations try to use gender neutral language for generic statements in the Greek Bible. Often that includes changing the statement to fit the word "they/them/their" in English.

NIV Revelation 2:7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

ESV Revelation 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

BGT Revelation 2:7 Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ. (Rev. 2:7 BGT)

Notice how the NIV tries to use "they" to replace a masculine pronoun. ESV advocates often argue that this moves away from a literal translation. My response would be that "he" obscures the Greek text as well, so you have to choose your poison. Do you move to "they" as a concession, or do you reinforce androcentricity (male-centered reading) as a concession? Again, I feel the need to point out the ESV oversight committee is all men. It strikes me as grossly irresponsible to make this kind of decision without oversight input from women translators and scholars. After all, more than 50% of Bible readers are women.

The goal of a good translation is not literal word-for-word translation: languages are different, they have different constructs and structures (For example, the Greek particle ἄν is untranslatable). The goal is faithfulness to the original text. In many cases, faithfulness is trying to bring the Greek word into English with as close alignment as can be acquired.

Summary and Implications of My Argument about αὐτός/autos

The ESV assumes that translating the generic use of autos as "he/his/him" is "literal" translation. My argument is that John 4:14 proves that invalid. John 4:14 proves that Greek speakers/writers/readers/hearers would naturally de-genderize the autos in a mixed gender context. Thus, in all cases where the generic autos is used, the only occasions a masculine pronoun should be used, are in contexts where the translator can be sure the statement does not relate to women in any way whatsoever (e.g., in relation to circumcision).

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 15

Phoebe, Deacon and Benefactor (Romans 16:1-2)

Whenever I hear people say, "according to Paul women can't...", my first thought is: but women did. And often Paul sent them to do it. When I had a change of mind about women in ministry in seminary, much of this happened when I took a closer look at what women actually did in Paul's ministries. A good place to start with that is Phoebe.

(If you want a mind-blowing lecture about Phoebe, watch this video by Beverly Gaventa.)

NIV Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.

2 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.

(Rom. 16:1-2 NIV)

Paul commends Phoebe to the Romans, because he has sent her with his letter to the Romans. She probably played the role of letter carrier. She would also be on hand to answer interpretive questions

about the letter. And, some scholars believe she actually read the letter to the Romans. (See an overview of the discussion here). Bottom line: she was an important, trusted colleague of Paul. She was not someone's wife or an errand girl. She is mentioned without naming a counterpart male. That is crucial to recognize in and of itself. Let's do a quick inventory of some of the language Paul uses for Phoebe.

Sister

This might seem like mundane Christian language, as in "fellow believer." Perhaps, but this could have been taken for granted in the context of commending her as a deacon from Cenchrae. I read into the mentioning of her as "sister" more of a title of honor, a fellow leader of the church. Two things point in this direction. First, Paul mentions many women in Romans 16, but only calls Phoebe "sister." Notice in his letter to Philemon, he also addresses it to Apphia whom he also calls "sister" (the only other place where this seems to be a title; Phm 1). Second, several times in his letters, Paul refers to Timothy as "our brother" (1 Thess 3:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phm 1; Col 1:1). I think this was Paul's way of commending Timothy as a respected fellow leader.

Servant or Deacon?

Paul calls Phoebe a diakonos from the church of Cenchrea. Some translations render this as "servant," but diakonos had a rather wide range of usage and could be used as more of a church leadership title (see Phil 1:1). Given Paul's desire to commend her, the fact that she was setting up operations in Rome and needed help with her work, and her function as a benefactor for Paul (see below), "deacon" is a better term here (so NIV). If she was not an official leader of the church of Cenchrea, I imagine Paul would have used the verb (diakoneo) for her service, rather than the noun (diakonos).

In Paul's letters, diakonos is applied to the following people:

- Christ (Rom 15:8)
- Apollos (1 Cor 3:5)
- The apostles (by inference; 2 Cor 6:4)
- Paul (Eph 3:7; Col 1:23, 25)
- Tychicus (in a commendation; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7)
- Epaphras (Col 1:7)

This is not a term Paul throws around for any helpful person (and apparently for no other woman named in his letters). He strategically uses this word to recognize servant leaders of churches.

Assist her

Rom 16:2b makes it clear she had some agenda in Rome, and Paul calls upon the church to support her in whatever she needs. We can hardly treat her as anything but a proxy for Paul himself.

Benefactor

Paul is confident that she is deserving of their help, because she helped Paul so much. He refers to her as a prostatis: benefactor. She was a woman of wealth and means; probably she did more than give money though. She used her power and connections to help others in the church. The Cenchrean church may have met at her house/estate. Christopher Bryan refers to Paul as Phoebe's "client and protege"! (Preface to Romans, pg 34)

Was She a Leader?

Paul does not explicitly say she preached sermons. He does not say she sat on a council of elders. But we need to think about leadership more holistically. Leadership is about input and influence. My desire that women should serve in ministry is not limited to sermons. It is about men sharing influence and power. When it comes to Phoebe, the signals we get from Romans 16 overall is that Paul was not isolated from women, he knew and respected them, especially as co-workers in ministry leadership.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 16

Junia was a Prominent Female Apostle of the First Century Church

Did you know there is a woman who is named an apostle in the New Testament? To be accurate, she is actually commended as prominent or noteworthy among the first century apostles.

NIV Romans 16:7 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. (Rom. 16:7 NIV)

Perhaps you didn't fully catch how important this little verse is. But why has it escaped the notice of most Christians? In the medieval period, translators and commentators on the Bible shifted this female name "Junia" to a made-up male name "Junias." Why? Christian scholars and leaders simply could not believe that Paul could call a woman an apostle. So for more than 500 years, Andronicus and Junias were both believed to be men (see RSV)—until more investigation was done on Junia and her female identity restored. All of this is well-documented in Eldon Epp's now classic work, *Junia, the First Woman Apostle* (2005).

Now, virtually all translations recognize her female identity (NIV, NRSV, NET, CSB), but there is ongoing debate about whether or not Paul was calling her an "apostle." I believe the weight of evidence balances strongly in favor of "apostle Junia." But let's take our time to get to know Junia.

Junia Was A Prisoner Because of Her Ministry

Paul mentions in his commendation of Andronicus and Junia that they shared imprisonment with him. This implies incarceration for the sake of the Gospel. NT scholar Christoph Stenschke offers these considerations:

Paul presumes "the imprisonment of Rom 16:7 was the consequence of rejected missionary activities which involved Andronicus, Junia, and Paul...Junia must have been involved or at least perceived to have participated in these activities to an extent that she was imprisoned together with the men." (157; Bibliography below)

That means she was a "front-lines" ministry leader; she was treated by the state as enough of a threat to merit imprisonment. Paul goes out of his way to mention this to commend their risk-taking in ministry, courage, and resilience.

Prominent to the Apostles, or Prominent among the Apostles?

Virtually all English translations now agree "Junia" is a woman. Where there is much ongoing disagreement is on whether or not Paul was calling her an apostle. Based on the Greek text, Paul's words could be read either way; so:

"They are well known to the apostles" (ESV, HCSB)

"They are outstanding among the apostles" (NIV; see NRSV)

Can anything break the deadlock of this translation conundrum? One of the tools in the toolbelt of the biblical scholar is listening to the commentaries of the early church Fathers who (1) were much closer in time and culture to the NT writers than we are today and (2) [if they were Greek-speaking] knew better how to interpret Paul's Greek words.

The early Church Fathers testify clear to Junia's status as "apostle."

Let the Greek Church Fathers Testify

Just read the following; I find it deeply inspiring.

Origen (184-253AD)

"He might have called them [Andronicus and Junia] prominent among the apostles and among the apostles who preceded him because they were among the seventy-two who were also called apostles (Luke 10:1)." [Commentary on Romans 10.17; FotC 104.294-295]; later he writes they were "fellow-captives in this world and noble among the apostles" (295).

John Chrysostom (348-407AD)

"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 apostle" (In ep. ad Romanos 31.2). [It is troubling to me that those who argue that Junia was not as apostle fail to account for Chrysostom's confident statement]

Theodoret of Cyrus (393-457AD)

"He says they were not among the disciples but among the teachers—not any sort of teachers but the apostles!" (Interpret. 82.200; see Epp, 33)

Keep in mind, these are Greek Fathers, meaning Greek was their native language. Yet, none of these ever wondered whether this verse might be translated differently. Put simply, these Greek Fathers believed Junia was a female apostle.

What Does This Mean for Christian Woman Today?

This means women did ministry commended by Paul, and they did it on equal footing as men. If they were gifted to proclaim the gospel publicly as "apostles," then they were authorized with the highest responsibilities including the authority of evangelizing and planting churches. If Junia was an apostle, this establishes a sterling precedent for women as church planters, preachers, teachers, missionaries, and elders. And they can aim high because she was prominent among the people called "apostles."

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J. E. Epp, Junia: The First Woman Apostle. (2005) [Tide-turning study]

S. McKnight, Junia is Not Alone. [Argument for Junia as apostle that is non-technical]

C. Stenschke, "Married Women and the Spread of Early Christianity" Neotestamentica 43.1 (2009): 145-194.

See "Junia, A Female Apostle" (CBE)

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 17

Biblical Interpretation and Modern Cultural Influences

Sometimes I hear this argument: you are just arguing for women leadership because of modern sensitivity to women's rights.

This is an important issue, because this can be a real obstacle for people accepting an argument in favor of women in ministry—that somehow it is contaminated by cultural pressure and therefore spoiled.

I want to raise the following points in response.

1) Modern culture is not a threat per se to the Bible

We cannot sustain the assumption that all modern cultural forces are bad. There are a lot of good things in culture.

2) Biblical interpretation does not take place in a vacuum

We do not take off our presuppositions, experiences, or values when we approach the Bible. We bring ourselves to the reading of the text.

3) Sometimes modern cultural insights can be beneficial

Imagine that you have a child with a disability. And that you bring interest in people with disabilities to the biblical text. Your eyes are more trained to see those who are different in the Bible. By virtue of these experiences, you have something special to bring to others whose eyes are not trained the same way. This actually enhances your reading of the Bible, and this can help others.

4) Cultural values need to be recognized, not suppressed

We cannot discard our cultural values, but we ought to understand them as best as we can. How do we keep them in check if they might clash with Scripture? We need to be a part of a reading community that can form and help us, and correct us if we are not respecting the holy Word.

Summary

It was seeing women training for and in ministry (and as theologians) that first sparked me to re-think women in ministry leadership. I can readily admit that. But that turned me to the Bible to examine the relevant texts exegetically. Cultural forces are not always bad—they are often eye-opening for our reading of the Bible. Ultimately, though, Christian conviction should be grounded in biblical witness and wisdom. And for me it is. The more I re-read the Bible, the more I see amazing women exercising leadership for the good of the church and society.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 18

The Books that Helped Me Change My Mind about Women in Ministry (written before 2003)
I changed my mind in favor of supporting women in ministry around 2003, while I was in seminary. In this post, I will mention a few books then that moved me along on this issue towards that change. In a separate post I will point to more recent works of note.

Craig Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*. Here is a conservative, biblical scholar who is absolutely brilliant, and he had answers to a lot of my questions. Craig is always careful with his scholarship not to overstate what the evidence can prove.

Beck and Blomberg, ed. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. On the "pro" side you have Keener and Belleville, on the "not-pro" side you have Schreiner and Blomberg. This book helped me see the strengths of various arguments and how the "other side" would respond.

Ben Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*. Back then, Ben was someone I admired greatly as a biblical scholar and thought-leader for pastors—and I still love his work, but he is slowing down just a little bit! He made his case with penetrating insight and good scholarship.

Gordon Fee—commentaries. In seminary, I spent ample time in the commentaries of Gordon Fee, esp on 1 Corinthians and Philippians (and also check out his little 1-2 Timothy, Titus NIBC volume). For me, there is no better role model of the passionate and wise biblical scholar than Fee. His exegetical work was significant towards turning me in favor of women in ministry.

Discovering Bible Eq #2834

Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon Fee, *Discovering Biblical Equality*. This book was a bombshell for me. Here, all in one place, several expert scholars tackled virtually all of the tough issues related to women in marriage and ministry. Even today, there is nothing that compares in size and scope to DBE! I was especially attracted to Howard Marshall's essay on the Household Codes. I still refer to back to that today when I teach or write on Col/Eph.

Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*. When I was at Gordon-Conwell, Bauckham's influence and status were on the rise. He is considered one of the most weighty NT scholars in the world. So when he did the spadework on the women in the Gospels, I was hooked. **READ THIS BOOK!**

William Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*. This book put words to some hermeneutical thoughts and questions I had. Whether or not you end up agreeing with Webb, it is a must-read. Webb has forced Christians to think about the ultimate ethics behind Scripture and how we might discern what those ethics are. This was a missing piece I needed.

Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church*. This book is clear, concise, and hit all the major concerns. She also introduced me to the work of Broton, where I learned about what leadership titles women had in the ancient Jewish synagogues.

Klyne Snodgrass, "A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry" (The Evangelical Covenant Church). I was very interested in evangelical denominations wrestling with questions about women in ministry. Klyne and his committee did their research on this and came out supporting women in ministry. Klyne is a trusted evangelical scholar, a Gospels expert, he also knows his way around Paul's letters. I appreciate the ECCs work on this issue.

Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present*. This is a massive book (450+ pp.) which gave me a sense of women in ministry not only in the early church, but throughout history.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 20

Recommended Reading on Women in Ministry

Recent books and classic works worth consulting. [* = Highly recommended]

Non-Technical Books

(suitable for laypeople and readers with little or no theological education)

*James Beck and Craig Blomberg, ed. *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Zondervan, 2005).

A helpful counterpoint perspective with multiple contributors.

Michael F. Bird, *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts: A Case for Gender Equality in Ministry* (Zondervan, 2011, Kindle only)

In this short book, Bird gives his take on the issues; he points out non sequiturs in complementarian approaches and the dangers of overinterpretation.

Michelle Lee-Barnewall, *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian* (Baker, 2016)

Lee-Barnewall notes how current conversations can be very individualistic, but God's vision for the church (and its leadership) requires re-centering on the kingdom and the gospel as a people together.

Cohick.jpg*Lynn Cohick. *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Baker, 2009).

Cohick is an expert in the lives of women in everyday life in the Roman world, and sheds light on the lives of early Christian women.

Mark Husbands and Timothy Larsen, ed. *Women, Ministry, and the Gospel: Exploring New Paradigms* (IVP, 2007).

This book comes out of a Wheaton conference and brings diverse voices together for cooperative discussion on "new paradigms" or new paths forward.

*Alan F. Johnson, ed. *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership* (Zondervan, 2010).

I love this book b/c too often people make this a conservative (=complementarian) vs. liberal (=egalitarian) issue; but all of these conservative evangelicals in this book talk about how they changed their mind towards supporting women in ministry, while maintaining a high view of Scripture and theological orthodoxy.

Catherine Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, ed. *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary* (IVP, 2002).

800+ pages; a multi-contributor commentary on the whole Bible which takes a special interest in the perspectives, lives, and experiences of women. A great resource!

Scot McKnight, *Junia is Not Alone* (Zondervan, 2011, Kindle only)

McKnight's short articulation of his approach to women in ministry. Concise, clear, and compelling.

Lucy Peppiatt, *Unveiling Paul's Women: Making Sense of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16* (Cascade, 2018, Kindle only).

*Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women* (IVP, 2019, forthcoming).

Peppiatt is quickly becoming a major voice in this subject matter. She has some fresh readings of Pauline texts (obviously 1 Cor 11 is a major focus), but her forthcoming book from IVP articulates a more comprehensive reading of Women in Scripture.

Barbara E. Reid, *Wisdom's Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretation of the Scriptures* (Eerdmans, 2016).

I used to think "feminist" was a bad word. Reid changed my mind and helped me see the deep value of this perspective.

F. Scott Spencer, *Salty Wives, Spirited Mothers, and Savvy Widows: Capable Women of Purpose and Persistence in Luke's Gospel* (Eerdmans, 2012).

This is a remarkable book on the Gospel of Luke. If you read this book, Luke will never be the same. Spencer especially drew my attention to the beauty and importance of Mary's Magnificat.

*Derek and Dianne Tidball, *The Message of Women* (IVP, 2014). [Tidball.jpg](#)

If you want to recommend something to your friends that is very evangelical-friendly, simple to understand, and compelling, the Tidballs offer a winsome vision for embracing women and men together in ministry and life.

Technical Books

(advanced reading that requires knowledge of Greek and some theological education)

*Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women*.

When I was at Gordon-Conwell, Bauckham's influence and status were on the rise. He is considered one of the most weighty NT scholars in the world. So when he did the spadework on the women in the Gospels, I was hooked. **READ THIS BOOK!**

*Eldon J. Epp. *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Fortress, 2005).

Eldon definitively proves that Junia is a woman, and also gives strong evidence in favor of her as an apostle.

Philip Barton Payne. *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Zondervan, 2009).

At 500+ pages, PBP's work is a rather comprehensive treatment of problem texts in Paul.

*Ronald Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothius, and Gordon Fee, *Discovering Biblical Equality*.

This book was a bombshell for me. Here, all in one place, several expert scholars tackled virtually all of the tough issues related to women in marriage and ministry. Even today, there is nothing that compares in size and scope to DBE! I was especially attracted to Howard Marshall's essay on the Household Codes. I still refer to back to that today when I teach or write on Col/Eph.

Paul and Gender*Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender* (Baker, 2016).

Westfall has written a well-rounded book, methodologically rigorous, meticulously researched, loaded with new insights; her work on 1 Timothy 2 is especially good.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 19

Does 1 Timothy 2:12 Prohibit Women from Leading and Preaching over Men in the Church?

For those who argue that women should not be preachers, elders, or leaders (over men) in the church, they often appeal to 1 Timothy 2:12 as their most direct and clear biblical foundation. Here are some questions I want to discuss:

Is Paul offering universal and general teaching in 1 Timothy 2:8-15?

Does this passage teach that women cannot have authority over men in the Church?

1 Timothy is an occasional letter, not a comprehensive church leadership manual

The "Pastoral Epistles" are situational letters, from Paul to a particular individual (here Timothy) in order to address certain circumstances. Now, all of Paul's letters contain some general teaching. But, sometimes, his teaching is more limited to one situation. Only the literary/rhetorical and socio-historical context will tell us whether the teaching is "once and for all."

Did Paul write 1 Timothy?

Scholars continue to debate whether Paul actually wrote 1 Timothy, or if perhaps it was written in a later era by someone else. My own view is that it probably has some historical connection to the apostle Paul. I admit its style of writing and argumentation don't match letters like Philippians and Romans, but I don't see any contradictions in theological teachings when 1 Timothy is compared against the so-called undisputed letters.

Looking at the Text in Context (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

8 Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.9 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,10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.15 But women will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (NIV)

While Paul has some very firm commands to pass on to the Ephesian church through Timothy, one can't help but notice that he argues in this manner:

-Do THIS, don't do THIS

The prohibitions (2:8, 9, 12) included here lead me to believe there were serious problems going on in this church precisely on these matters. I think it is fair to assume men were disputing and creating a ruckus. Women were flaunting wealth. And, thus, I take 2:11-12 to be referring to clear misbehavior on the part of some of the Ephesian women.

If we take this as corrective teaching, we can better understand Paul's harsh tone. Paul recognizes this church has been infected with many diseases of false teaching, in-fighting, and genderized furtive behavior—and he calls the theological physician, Timothy, to put the church on a very strict lifestyle and diet.

What Does "Assume Authority" (NIV) Mean?

This is where things get really tricky. When Paul normally talks about authority (power and leadership over another), he uses *kyrieuo* (rule over; w.g., Rom 7:1), or some form of *exousia* (e.g., Rom 13). These are relatively common word groups. But here in 1 Timothy 2:12 Paul uses an extremely rare and unusual Greek word *authenteo*. It occurs less than a dozen times in ancient Greek (first century AD and prior). Compare that to *exousiazo* ("to have authority over") which occurs over 900 times in ancient Greek. We will get to what *authenteo* means in a minute, but just take a second to think about this: why would Paul choose such a rare word unless it fit a strange and rare situation?

So what does *authenteo* mean? Many English translations render it as "have/exercise authority" in a neutral/positive sense.

HCSB: "to have authority"

ESV: to exercise authority"

NET: "to exercise authority"

RSV: "to have authority"

Essentially, then, these translation treat *authenteo* as a synonym of *exousiazo*. But, again, if they are so close in meaning, why choose such a rare word?

Based on the meager evidence we have for how ancient Greek writers used *authenteo* (and other words based on the same root), another set of translators believe it has a more negative meaning of domineer (especially based on other forms of the root).

So the King James: "to usurp authority," and the NIV seems to have moved in this direction: "to assume authority." This kind of meaning is supported by the Latin Vulgate translation which reads *dominari* (from which we get the English word "dominate").

To my mind, it would make all the sense in the world that Paul would choose this rare word *authenteo* if Paul wanted to tell women not to try and dominate over men with their teaching or power. In this kind of situation, Paul would not be rejecting women who want to be equal in the church. He would be demoting women who want to seize total control.

Chew on this #1: It is hard for lay people to fully understand just how rare the usage of *authenteo* was at Paul's time. So think about it this way: have you ever used a word that (1) you will never use again, (2) you will never hear from another person ever, (3) and will never read anywhere ever again? That is how unusual it would have been for Paul to use *authenteo*. So why would he not have chosen a more common word if he was giving a direct and clear universal command through a third party (Timothy)?

Chew on this #2: *authenteo* does not occur (elsewhere) in the New Testament. It does not occur in the Septuagint (including the OT Apocrypha). It does not occur in the Greek OT Pseudepigrapha. It does not appear in any of the works of Josephus. Or Philo. Or any of the Apostolic Fathers. Isn't that strange?

What about the Appeal to a Creation Story?

Some interpreters argue that women (universally) are taught here to be submissive to men because of the appeal to Adam and Eve in 2:13-14. Certainly when Paul points to key Old Testament stories, he has a broader point in mind. But the focus of this Scriptural appeal is not based on the inherent superiority of men due to privilege of the firstborn. After all, Paul elsewhere places the majority of blame on Adam, not (Rom 5; 1 Cor 15), not Eve. The mentioning of Eve's deception by Paul is his way of humbling any arrogant Ephesian women who want to cause trouble for the men, believing they were wiser.

Chew on this #3: How could the same Paul who (supposedly) told women to be quiet in church and listen to the men teach also send Phoebe to deliver Romans and commend her as his patroness and deacon/minister? How could he maintain such a cordial relationship with Priscilla who certainly was not quiet in her leadership?

Conclusion

I understand this passage to be corrective of a disturbingly imbalanced situation in Ephesus where women were intentionally trying to domineer over men. Paul's concern is not to force women into submission in the church under men, but to cultivate a healthy community by rebuking troublemakers. Everyone should learn peacefully and cooperatively.

Further Resources

This is a very complex discussion with many moving parts, so those with some Greek knowledge and training might want to read more. See below:

Cynthia Long Westfall (advanced article on *authenteo*)

Linda Belleville (more comprehensive discussion of 1 Timothy 2)

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 21

Answers to Questions

How do we know when commands in Scripture are universal vs. contextually limited/cultural?

Often we can sense it based on context ("do not commit adultery"—that's clearly universal!). But sometimes it is very difficult because the Bible contains so many different genres and you extrapolate ethics somewhat differently based on that. When it comes to Paul's letters, there are a few ways to be sure—repetition: do we see it in several contexts? Clear and common language; or, the put it the other

way around, when Paul uses rare and unusual terms or vocabulary, it leads one to believe the situation is more restricted. On this particular issue, I find the central texts (1 Cor 11, 14, 1 Tim 2) have such peculiar arguments and vocabulary that it hardly proves universal barring of women in ministry leadership. On some of the methodological matters, see my article: "Mirror-Reading Moral Issues in Paul."

What do you think about wives' submission in the home?

I believe Scripture's ideal is stated in Eph 5:21: mutual submission. I'm not even really sure what female "submission" would look like. My wife and I talk through and share all decisions. Sometimes I go with what she wants, sometimes (perhaps often) she goes with my preference, because she is very generous and thoughtful. On "big" issues, I can't imagine it would be helpful for me to dictate to her anything. I can confess I often lack common sense, and she is very wise, so I trust her. At home, I do the cooking, she does laundry and cleaning, she does a lot of the yard work, I get the cars serviced and pay bills—we don't care much for traditional gender roles in the home. What works is that we both try to live out the fruit of the Spirit in our marriage, and we have a happy marriage. We are just husband and wife working together to live for Christ. We have our challenges like anyone else, but power dynamics is not one of them. (Craig Keener has a nice little essay on mutual submission)

Is women in ministry a make-or-break issue? What is at stake?

I would not go as far as saying that my complementarian friends are unsaved or preaching heresy. But I think that if our churches are 60% women, and we cut them out of decision-making in the church, and we silence their powerful voices, that comes at a high price and leaves the church diminished and weak. I will have a final post on what my hopes are for this issue in the future.

If I read just one book on the subject to learn more, what do you recommend?

If you have the time and know a bit already about the subject, read *Discovering Biblical Equality*. If you are newer to the discussion, read Derek and Dianne Tidball's *The Message of Women*.

If shared ministry (men and women) is the ideal, how did the church so quickly become patriarchal in its dominant forms?

That is not my expertise, I must confess, but I would say that the NT doesn't come right out and say, "Hey, make women pastors!" It sets the foundation and sows the seeds for it, and the 2nd century and 3rd century Christians needed to move that idea forward, and by and large, they didn't. I think church tradition has its place, we need to respect the decisions of those who came before us, but we know they weren't always right. There are some amazing female voices from the Patristic world that we have neglected. Learn more about Macrina the Younger.

What are the most effective tools to create change in the church around this issue?

Writing books has been our usual tactic, and that is good, of course, but it is not enough. This is not going to sound very theological, but I have learned that for change to be widespread, we need to influence influencers. That means gracious and trust-filled conversations with soft complementarians. That means developing relationships with those with whom we disagree, avoiding lobbing grenades, rejecting name-calling, speaking with respect. This can be hard sometimes, but it is the only way to earn a voice.

Why I Believe in Women in Ministry: Part 22

This is the final post in this series (22). If you want to catch up on or look at old posts, go to the INDEX.

My Hopes for the Women in Ministry Conversation

What do you hope to achieve? I have been asking myself this question for the last 3 weeks, as I have produced these 20+ posts. What difference does it make? I am not the first person to make these arguments. I stand on the should of giants like Keener, Witherington, Bauckham, Cohick, Westfall, Fee, Belleville, Marshall, Reid, and others. And I know for many Christian leaders out there, they are settled into their views of men-leadership only, and I can't blame them, I too am confident in my view of shared (women and men together) leadership. But here are my hopes.

For Those Who Believe Women Cannot be Pastors, Elders, Preachers, or Teachers over a Mixed Congregation of Men and Women

I hope you will find ways to listen carefully to women in your church. If you don't permit them to teach or preach, ask women to pray up front and give their testimonies about what God is doing in their life. Women and men in the church need to see faithful women of God up front as part of the people of God in shared ministry. Women can do much more than sing and play piano. They have words of wisdom to share, even as laypeople. Let them be seen and heard.

Even as you thank women in your church for serving behind the scenes, also get to know how they do evangelism in everyday life, what they are up to as they lead Bible studies, and as they regularly give wise counsel to others.

For Those Who Are On the Fence about Women in Ministry

Take the "Gupta" wager. I believe you will lose more by taking the risk of restricting women from vocal and executive leadership (in shared ministry) than if you allow them. You could be wrong. I could be wrong. But I am willing to meet my Maker with a clear conscience that I believe Scripture isn't 100% clear on this, and I need to act according to conviction and wise counsel. Since I have believed in women in ministry (~2004), I have been impressed with virtually all of the women elders, pastors, and teachers I have encountered. I did not turn into a crazy liberal. I still love Jesus, the Bible, and the Church.

Read more, study more, and stay in the conversation. Talk to women pastors about their discernment of ministry and their experiences.

For Men and Women Who Support Women in Ministry

Be vocal, encourage and thank the women around you, advocate for them, tell them their sermon was good if you thought so. It is easy to underestimate the amount of negative feedback women receive as women leaders in ministry. They get criticized on outfits, hair, makeup, their voice, their mannerisms, etc. Men walk out of sermons by women sometimes. People occasionally yell negative things. And don't forget harassment on social media. Send positive emails and notes—things women leaders can read over again to remind themselves they are not alone.

For Women Leaders and Pastors

Be encouraged—many of us think your vocation and the use of your gifts are biblical and fruitful!