

Women and Men in the Ministry of Imago Dei Community: A Mutualist Position of Full Partnership and Shared Leadership

Our Position

We believe that women and men ministering and leading together is both God's original and His redeemed design. We believe the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry. It is our conviction that God intends for women and men to teach, lead, and serve together in a full partnership. This kind of partnership involves complete participation, collaboration, mutual support, and unity of purpose. In this partnership, each person has a voice and a valued perspective in the work of ministry. Accordingly, at Imago Dei Community women are fully included in the life of the church, and both men and women are free to participate in all ministries and positions, including the roles of elder and Lead Pastor.

Complementarity without Hierarchy

We believe a woman's true and redeemed femininity and a man's true and redeemed masculinity¹ are both good and sacred gifts from God. We believe God designed men and women to be distinctly different and to complement one another in relationships of mutuality and equal partnership. We believe this mutuality of women and men doesn't involve any fixed hierarchies based on biological sex,² such as male leadership and female submission. Rather, we believe both women and men are called to mutual submission and to follow the example of Jesus in using their power and authority to guide, empower, and serve others in love and humility (Matt. 20:25-28; John 13:13-17; Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 5:2-3).

Biblical Basis³

The Bible teaches⁴ that both man and woman were created equally in God's image and given the shared responsibility of ruling over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). Moreover, God's design for the relationship between women and men is a full and equal partnership (Gen. 2:18, 21-23). God created woman to be a "suitable helper," a Hebrew phrase which means that she both corresponds to man and complements him, while leading right alongside him. However, when the woman and the man together disobeyed God, their relationship of partnership, mutuality, and equality was tragically ruined by sin. The rulership of man over woman resulted from the Fall and was not part of God's original design (Gen. 3:16).

¹ We are keenly aware that many people have experienced hurt and injury as a result of broken and distorted expressions of femininity and masculinity, both outside and inside the church. In light of this, we want to be very clear to distinguish true and redeemed masculinity and femininity from their sinful and toxic manifestations in culture. It is the ongoing work of the church, as it is renewed and informed by the Spirit, to strive toward the redeemed embodiment of our maleness and femaleness.

² In ordinary speech, the terms "sex" and "gender" are often used interchangeably. However, "gender" is increasingly being used to refer to the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of being male or female, while "sex" is used to refer to those that are biologically determined. Thus, for the sake of clarity, we will use the terms "sex" or "biological sex" when we mean the biological differences between females and males.

³ See Appendix A for an expanded explanation of the Scriptural support for our position.

⁴ For the interpretive principles that underlie the following biblical basis for our position, see Appendix B.

Jesus' inclusion of women and His ministry to them and through them were a powerful witness to the early church of God's original design for a mutual partnership of women and men serving and leading together. In every way, Jesus created a new covenant people around Himself that embodied harmony and participation between the sexes. He invited men and women to be His disciples, He filled all of them with the Spirit, and He sent them out into the world to make more disciples. Indeed, Jesus chose women to be the first witnesses of His resurrection and the first ones to proclaim the good news of the risen Lord. In the Gospels, we see Jesus restoring God's original design for the roles of men and women and setting the people of God on a new course.

When the church was born at Pentecost, the Spirit of God was poured out on both men and women, enabling them to prophesy and empowering them to fulfill the Great Commission of proclaiming the gospel to all nations (Acts 2:18). The Holy Spirit also distributed gifts to both women and men and equipped them to build up the church. The Book of Acts highlights a number of women who played leading roles in the early church, including Lydia and Priscilla. Priscilla, together with her husband Aquila, taught the bold and impressive Apollos (Acts 18:26). The seeds of greater equality, inclusion, partnership, and harmony between the sexes that Jesus planted in His ministry were growing and bearing fruit—seeds that produce greater human flourishing and that one day will come to full fruition in the new creation when we experience true righteousness and holiness in our relationships with God and one another.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul proclaims the new creation reality that in Christ all are equal before God in the Kingdom (3:26-28). One new humanity has been created in Christ, in which women and men together carry out the mission of Christ. Paul says that women pray and prophesy as part of the church's worship gathering (1 Cor. 11:5). As Paul goes on to describe prophecy, it is a vocal, public, and authoritative activity that provides edification, encouragement, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). Paul also teaches that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts with no indication that biological sex is a factor (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 14:31).

Paul's letters to the churches also name twelve women who were his coworkers in the ministry of the gospel, including Junia, who was regarded as "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7, NIV). The evidence of these twelve women makes it clear that women, as well as men, participated in significant leadership roles in the ministry of the apostolic church. Moreover, Paul used the same terminology to refer to his male and female coworkers, making no distinctions in roles or functions between men and women.

Our view of the two primary passages used to argue against women preaching, teaching, and leading in the church is that they are not universal and permanent prohibitions, but rather are addressing specific local situations, as the letters of the New Testament so often do.⁵

⁵ See Appendix C for our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

Unity with Diversity in Community

Broadly speaking, two main views⁶ have emerged among evangelicals regarding the role of women in ministry and leadership in the church. On one hand, egalitarians and mutualists⁷ believe that women and men are equal in God's eyes and equal in their ability to perform all the roles and offices in the church. Accordingly, this view strongly values the inclusion of women at every level. On the other hand, complementarians⁸ and hierarchicalists believe that men and women have equal value in God's eyes, but were created for different roles in the church⁹. As a result, women are restricted from certain ministry positions. Evangelicals recognize that both views have reasonable and biblical arguments to support them.

People in our congregation have a variety of views—and our elders and staff may personally hold a different position—but our Council of Elders is united in following this position and policy. It will be our guide for leading and shepherding the community of Imago Dei. At the same time, we believe that this issue is one in which differences within faithful orthodoxy are acceptable. We acknowledge that faithful students of Scripture come to differing perspectives because of the complexity of biblical interpretation and contextualization concerning this issue. Thus, we don't require agreement or disapprove of those who hold to a different view. Indeed, we welcome all those who may disagree so long as they discuss the issue humbly and without causing division.

Marriage at Imago Dei Community¹⁰

While this statement doesn't address marriage, we believe that there is biblical freedom for husbands and wives to order their relationship according to their convictions. We believe that as couples seek Jesus together, honor one another above themselves, and sacrificially love their spouses that the Holy Spirit will guide them into a fruitful marriage and the peace of Christ. What is biblically essential is that both wives and husbands seek Christ as Lord of their marriage and seek to love each other as Christ has loved us.

Our Policy

- Imago Dei Community will seek to honor, value, and respect the women and men of our church community as equal heirs of God's grace and gifted partners in ministry.

⁶ While there is a spectrum of views on this issue, the most basic division is over the question of whether women are restricted from certain roles and subordinated to male authority on the basis of biological sex alone.

⁷ We prefer the term "mutualist" for our position because it better expresses the ideas of partnership, commonality, reciprocity, and complementarity. In addition, it avoids the negative associations that the term "egalitarian" has with secular feminism and politics for some people.

⁸ Many egalitarians and mutualists have argued that women should participate equally with men precisely because they bring complementary gender qualities to ministry. We believe this term is more helpful in identifying an area of agreement between the two views than in expressing a point of difference. This is why we use the phrase "complementarity without hierarchy" to capture our vision of full partnership and shared leadership.

⁹ See Appendix E for our view of how the doctrine of the Trinity bears upon the debate about women and men in the ministries of the church.

¹⁰ See our "Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage" statement for a more detailed explanation of our view.

- We are committed to creating opportunities for women and men to lead together so that our church might flourish more fully as we complement one another with our distinct strengths. God created both “male and female” as the expression of Himself. We as a church community are not just better when women are given access to all leadership positions in the church, we are *whole*.
- Within the church, we will seek to promote the equality, dignity, value, and giftedness of women and to offer encouragement to women and men in areas where their giftedness has been traditionally discouraged.
- We will pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between men and women that led New Testament writers to describe them as family relationships of brothers and sisters.
- We appoint qualified men and women to the role of elder.¹¹ Elders are responsible before God for prayer ministry (James 5:14), ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4)—which includes teaching and guarding the church’s doctrine (Acts 20:27-31; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:9)—the administration of the church (1 Tim. 3:5), and shepherding the flock (1 Pet. 5:2). These responsibilities include guarding our mission, stewarding our finances, and governing the church.¹²
- We appoint qualified women and men to all pastoral roles, including Lead Pastor. Pastors serve under the elders to shepherd the flock (Eph. 4:11). Pastors are responsible for leading, managing, and equipping the congregation for our mission.
- We appoint qualified men and women to the role of deacon. Deacons serve under the elders to meet practical needs in the church (1 Tim. 3:8, 11; Rom. 16:1).
- We appoint qualified women and men to all other ministry positions in the church, including staff positions such as ministry director, administrator, coordinator, and specialist, as well as volunteer positions such as community group leader, small group leader, and ministry team leader.
- We expect our congregation to respectfully submit to all our leaders, including women, as they seek to lead with the heart of God.

Conclusion

We believe that a consistent and balanced interpretation¹³ of the full evidence of Scripture¹⁴ strongly affirms the full equality of men and women, their full and equal partnership, and the full participation of women in the ministries of the church. We believe the Bible teaches that women and men are created equally in God’s image, that they are equal participants in the new covenant community, and that they are equally filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit for life and ministry. We believe in the truth, goodness, freedom, and joy of mutualism and gender complementarity without hierarchy. We believe that men and women are better together and we long to see our church flourish more fully as we live out this vision with each other. For all these

¹¹ See Appendix D for an interpretation of the qualifications for elders from our mutualist perspective.

¹² See our “Elder/Overseer Position and Policy” statement for a fuller description of the role and responsibilities of elders at Imago Dei Community.

¹³ See Appendix B for the interpretive principles that underlie the biblical basis for mutualism.

¹⁴ See Appendix A for a more detailed explanation of the Scriptural support for mutualism.

reasons, at Imago Dei Community both women and men are free to participate in all ministries of the church.

Appendix A: Biblical Basis for Mutualism

The Basis in Creation

The foundation for the equal partnership of women and men is established in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. When God created human beings, He created them equally—both “male and female”—in His very own image to be His representatives. This mutuality of women and men is confirmed when God charges both the man and the woman together—without distinction of roles—with the joint responsibility of ruling over the creatures, rearing children, and stewarding His good creation (Gen. 1:26-28).

When the creation story is told again in Genesis 2, the full and equal partnership of man and woman appears again. The man is alone, so God provides him with a companion who is like him and yet different from him. God differentiates human beings into man and woman, persons of separate male and female identity. In this companionship, male and female relate to one another as equals. This is indicated by their common designations and their common identity of flesh and bone: “The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman” [*’ishshah*], for she was taken out of man [*’ish*]” (Gen. 2:23).¹⁵

Genesis 2 also says that in her partnership with the man, the woman will be a “suitable helper” (vv. 18, 20). The English word “helper” is a translation of the Hebrew word *’ezer*, which means much more than merely assisting someone with a task that they could do almost as well without any help. For *’ezer* is almost always used to describe God Himself, and sometimes it is used to refer to military reinforcements that are vital to winning a battle. So to “help” someone means to provide what they need out of your own strengths and abilities. Thus, the word *’ezer* doesn’t convey any implications of female subordination or inferiority, but rather that the woman serves God *with* the man out of her unique strengths.

The word “suitable” is literally “like opposite him.” In the context of the creation of human beings, in which a part of the man is removed to create the woman, this word strongly suggests that the man and the woman are incomplete without each other. Male and female are “like opposite” to one another in that they are neither exactly the same nor arbitrarily different. Rather, they were designed to be different in a special way such that they fit together like two halves of a whole.¹⁶ God’s design for the woman to be an equal image bearer and a “suitable helper” establishes a relationship of complementarity without hierarchy between the sexes.

¹⁵ Some have interpreted this verse as an act of naming by the man that demonstrates his headship or authority over the woman. However, that type of naming doesn’t occur until after the Fall when “Adam named his wife Eve” (Gen. 3:20).

¹⁶ The essence of the differences between the genders is somewhat mysterious and hard to define, and its particular expressions vary from culture to culture and era to era. Yet, the consistent presence of some form of gender differences across cultures and times points to an underlying essential distinctness.

This harmony and partnership didn't last long, however, for the woman and the man both disobey God. They are co-participants in their sin and immediately there are disastrous consequences for their relationship with God and their relationship with one another. Instead of unity, there is now blame shifting and alienation. Rather than their otherness being a source of completion, it becomes the grounds for oppression and exploitation. The relationship of partnership, mutuality, and equality that they once enjoyed is now tragically ruined by sin.

The rulership of man over woman resulted from the Fall and was not part of God's original design. The pronouncements of judgment upon the woman and the man for their disobedience are describing and predicting future realities, not mandating or prescribing how things ought to be. "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16) means that woman will seek to cultivate her relationship with her husband (that is, her desire will be for him in a positive sense), but instead she will receive back a broken, domineering relationship. The first couple wanted to be in the place of God, and now they and their descendents will continue to play God in their own lives by trying to overpower each other. The story of the Fall is one of the strong overpowering the weak and the beginnings of patriarchy.

Women Leaders in the Old Testament

Ancient Israel was a patriarchal society in which a woman was almost always under the authority of a man, whether her father, her brother, or her husband. In such a society, all religious and political offices were naturally held by men. However, there were powerful women who ably exercised their influence within the male-dominated structure of their society. Periodically, a woman rose to a position of leadership, although this was usually outside of a formal office.

For example, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, was given leadership responsibilities within the newly formed nation of Israel. When the Lord delivered Israel from Egypt, Miriam led her people in worship (Ex. 15:20-21). She also led alongside her brothers as a prophetess, and men and women honored her leadership and her authority to speak God's word (Num. 12:1-2, 15). Another example is Deborah, who in her role as both a judge and a prophetess is one of the clearest and most compelling cases of a woman leading and speaking authoritatively in the Old Testament. During her time, judges were chosen by God to lead His people in covenant loyalty. They were the highest level of authority in the land and the role was a combination of political, judicial, and military leadership. As a judge, Deborah spoke for God and commanded armies, and men sought out her leadership (Judg. 4:4-9, 14; 5:7).

The prophetess Huldah was another strong female leader in ancient Israel. When the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple, King Josiah consulted Huldah at a time when her contemporaries included the prophets Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. She was a trusted prophetess who commanded even the king on how he should obey God (2 Kings 22:14-20). Other examples include the wise woman of Abel, who spoke with authority, made decisions, and advised her town on how to solve its problem (2 Sam. 20:15-22), and Esther the

Queen, who with her cousin, Mordecai, worked together to accomplish God's purposes in changing Persian law and saving the Jewish people.¹⁷

While ancient Israelite society wasn't much different than the surrounding cultures of the time regarding patriarchy, there are nevertheless some examples of women speaking with divine authority or wisdom and exercising important leadership roles. It's significant that the accounts of these women leaders do not portray them negatively or as exceptions to patriarchy that ought to be avoided. Indeed, God was with these women in their efforts, and thus they can be seen as relativizing and even undermining the notion that patriarchy is God's ideal for human society. As will be maintained in the following sections, God's redeemed purpose for the relationship between women and men is to restore His original design of a partnership of equals.

The Basis in Jesus' Ministry

By the time of Jesus, Jewish society was still patriarchal and women were usually regarded as subordinate and inferior. They were expected to remain at home, to bear children for the family line, and to leave education, business, and politics to men. However, in stark contrast to His culture's attitudes and practices toward women and their roles, Jesus strongly affirmed the value and worth of women as persons to be included along with men in the love of God, as well as in serving God.

Women were involved in every part of Jesus' life and ministry, from Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna the prophetess at His birth, to Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who were present at His death and resurrection. Throughout His ministry, Jesus actively engaged women in conversation and intentionally reached out to women who were marginalized and rejected. In spite of the purity laws, Jesus allowed a woman with a twelve-year bleeding problem to touch Him, and He praised her faith (Mark 5:25-34). He permitted a sinful woman to anoint and kiss His feet (Luke 7:36-50). He also offered salvation directly to women who were known as adulteresses (John 4:4-42, 8:1-11).

Jesus taught women and included them in His group of committed disciples. It is remarkable that Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and the other women were not only financial supporters of Jesus' ministry, but also traveled with Him in the same way as the twelve disciples¹⁸ (Luke 8:1-3).

¹⁷ Other notable women in the Old Testament include Hagar, the first person to meet the angel of the Lord (Gen. 16:7-8); Sarah, whose husband Abraham was told by God to listen to her instructions (Gen. 21:12); Zipporah, who kept the covenant and thereby protected Moses from God's justice (Ex. 4:24-26); the "ministering women," who served at the entrance to the tabernacle (Ex. 38:8); the daughters of Zelophehad, who advocated for a change of the law (Num. 27:1-11); Rahab, who hid the spies, saved her family, and believed in the Lord (Josh. 2); Jael, an agent of God's judgment (Judg. 5:24-27); Ruth, who guided Boaz to fulfill his duty; Hannah, who made a vow (without her husband) and prayed prophetically (1 Sam. 1-2); Sheerah, who built multiple cities (1 Chron. 7:24); Abigail, who negotiated a peace agreement with David (1 Sam. 25:14-35); and "Lady Wisdom," the personification of God's wisdom in the Book of Proverbs (1-9).

¹⁸ Some have argued that Jesus' choice of twelve male disciples means that He supported a hierarchy of men over women. However, this can be seen as a symbolic action intended to convey that Jesus is the new Moses who has come to give a new covenant to the people of God and that He is forming a new Israel around Himself. Thus, the twelve male disciples represent the twelve tribes of Israel. This was a temporary provision in God's unfolding plan of salvation, not an expression of the permanent values of the

These same women were present at the crucifixion and burial and on the morning of the resurrection (Luke 23:49, 55-56, 24:1). Jesus taught Mary of Bethany and strongly affirmed her decision to take on the role of a disciple, a position reserved solely for men at that time in Jewish society (Luke 10:38-42). Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman in serious theological discussion and made His clearest revelation of His identity as the Messiah to her. He then empowered her to be an evangelist to her townspeople (John 4:4-42).

In a society in which women's testimony was not admissible in a court of law, it is very striking and significant that the women disciples were the first ones to see the risen Jesus and who were the first to be entrusted with the good news that He had been raised from the dead. Jesus chose women to be His witnesses to the greatest event to ever take place in human history and to be the first ones who would proclaim the gospel of Jesus as Savior and risen Lord. Is this not part of the larger reversal of status in the Kingdom of God, in which the first will be last and the last will be first?¹⁹

Jesus' inclusion of women in very public ways and His ministry to them and through them were a powerful witness to the early church of God's original design for a partnership of women and men serving and leading together. In every way, Jesus created a new covenant people around Himself that embodied harmony and participation between the sexes. He invited men and women to be His disciples, He filled all of them with the Spirit, and He sent them out into the world to make more disciples. In the Gospels, we see Jesus setting the people of God on a new course concerning the roles of men and women. In His treatment of women, Jesus planted the seeds of change that grew into a fuller expression and outworking in the life and ministry of the early church.

The Basis in the Early Church

In the Book of Acts, Luke tells us that women were part of the first church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14) and is careful to mention repeatedly that women were included as the church grew and spread (Acts 5:14; 8:3; 9:2; 17:34). When the Holy Spirit came in power in fulfillment of Scripture (Joel 2:28-32), both men and women were present (Acts 1-2). Peter interpreted the events of Pentecost to mean that God's Spirit had been poured out on both women and men, enabling them to prophesy and empowering them to fulfill the Great Commission of proclaiming the gospel to all nations. "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:18).²⁰

Kingdom of God. Outside of the twelve, Jesus invited a multitude of women and men to follow Him (Luke 8:1-3).

¹⁹ Some commentators suggest that in John's account of the resurrection Mary Magdalene is portrayed as undoing the curse of Eve. As a former demoniac, Mary, like Eve, experienced satanic deception, and this scene also takes place in a garden. However, whereas through Eve bad news went to the man and then out into the world, now through Mary good news goes to the male disciples and then out into the world (John 20:11-18).

²⁰ Throughout the history of the modern church, the events of Acts 2 have been one of the major arguments for women in ministry.

The role of women in establishing the church in Philippi is significant. Paul started the church there with a group of women who were gathered for prayer outside the city gate (Acts 16:13-15). Lydia, the first convert, became the leading member of the new church (Acts 16:14-15, 40) and when Paul later wrote to this church women still played a leading role in it (Phil. 4:2-3). It's likely that the cultural context in Macedonia made it more socially acceptable for women to have leadership roles, and Paul took advantage of this opportunity.

Some of the other women who are highlighted in Acts include Tabitha, who "was always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36-42), and the four daughters of Philip, who were all prophetesses (Acts 21:9). But the most prominent woman in Acts is Priscilla. She and her husband, Aquila, were important and well-known coworkers of Paul (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3-5). Together they taught the bold and impressive Apollos, taught new disciples, hosted a church, and ran a tent-making business. In light of the unusual way that both Luke and Paul usually mention Priscilla before her husband, it's likely that within this team she was the leading member and the one whose ministry was especially important for the growth of the early church. Paul's approval of this Jewish woman taking the lead in teaching Apollos, a Jewish man, is difficult to fit together with the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 that says Paul is forbidding any woman to ever teach or have authority over a man.

The early church was still a male-dominated movement, but the seeds of greater equality, harmony, and partnership between the sexes that Jesus planted in His ministry were growing and bearing fruit. In the Book of Acts we see the Spirit distributing gifts to both men and women and empowering them to engage in gospel ministry and to build up the church.

The Basis in Paul's Letters

Galatians 3:28, like Acts 2, has been one of the major arguments in favor of women in ministry in the modern church. In this passage, Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." It is often argued that this refers *only* to the spiritual reality of equal access to God through faith in Christ Jesus. However, Paul's use of the three basic social divisions in the Roman Empire of the first century suggests that the fundamental equality he expresses has social implications.

In his letter to Philemon, Paul worked out the implications of "neither slave nor free" when he asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus as a dear brother in the Lord (Philemon 15-17). Similarly, the implications for men and women in ministry began to be worked out as the church grew and spread to other regions. Paul's point isn't that there are now no distinctions between the sexes, but that these differences don't determine participation in the church for people created in the image of God. Paul is expressing the new creation reality that in Christ all are equal before God in the Kingdom (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-28). One new humanity has been created in and through Christ, in which women and men together carry out the mission of Christ, by His authority and for His glory.

In 1 Corinthians 11:11-12, Paul makes a strong statement about the mutuality of men and women in the context of his instructions about head coverings in order to avoid the

misunderstanding that women shouldn't participate in worship. Paul's discussion of head coverings takes for granted that women, as well as men, pray and prophesy as part of the worship gathering: "every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head" (1 Cor. 11:5). As Paul goes on to describe prophecy later in the letter, it is a vocal, public, and authoritative activity that provides edification, encouragement, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). Paul also teaches that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts with no indication that biological sex is a factor (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 14:31).

In addition, Paul's letters name twelve women who were his coworkers in the ministry of the gospel. This evidence of female partnership is often neglected. Three women are leaders of house churches (the only kind of church at the time): Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Nympha (Col. 4:15), and Apphia (Philem. 2). Four women are commended for "working very hard" in the Lord: Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Rom. 16:6, 12). Paul regularly used the Greek word translated as "worked very hard" to refer to the special work of the ministry of the gospel. In Philippians Paul refers to Euodia and Syntyche as his coworkers who "contended at [his] side in the cause of the gospel" (4:2-3), which suggests a role of considerable responsibility and authority.

In Paul's personal greetings in Romans 16, 10 of the 27 people he mentions are women, which indicates the significant role that women had in the early church. He greets Priscilla, calling her a coworker in Christ Jesus (Rom. 16:3-4), a term he uses for other associates with a central role in the Christian mission, such as Timothy. As discussed above, Priscilla was one of the most prominent female leaders in his ministry circle. Paul also greets Phoebe, who he refers to as a "deacon of the church in Cenchreae" and a "benefactor" (Rom. 16:1-2). She was apparently a person of sufficient authority to be entrusted with delivering Paul's letter to Rome. Indeed, many commentators think it likely that Phoebe was authorized by Paul to read and teach the letter to the churches in Rome. It's remarkable that Paul chose Phoebe for this task when he could have chosen a number of men instead.

Finally, Paul greets Junia and calls her an apostle—indeed, one who is "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7, NIV).²¹ In addition to the twelve apostles, there was a larger circle of apostles who were, like Paul, Timothy, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, and others, traveling missionary leaders. To be named an apostle is clearly a mark of high respect and significant responsibility and authority in the church. The evidence of these twelve named women makes it clear that women, as well as men, participated in significant leadership roles in the ministry of the apostolic church. Moreover, Paul used the same terminology to refer to his male and female coworkers, making no distinctions in roles or functions between men and women in ministry.

Appendix B: Principles of Biblical Interpretation

²¹ For a discussion of the history of the translation of this verse and the debate about Junia's status as an apostle, see Scot McKnight, "Appendix 6. Junia Is Not Alone" in *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible*, 2nd Edition.

It has been common for mutualists to be suspected of compromising the authority of Scripture and resorting to some kind of special interpretive approach. However, our view is grounded in a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture and does not come from a theologically liberal denial of Scripture's truth and authority for all time. In reality, the division isn't over the authority of Scripture, but rather over the right way to interpret and apply it. Many on both sides honestly come to different conclusions about what Scripture teaches because they are guided by different interpretive approaches. While our view is shaped by the principles of interpretation outlined here, it is nevertheless based on the traditional basic historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation.

Balanced Interpretation

Responsible biblical interpretation involves taking into account the whole of Scripture and explaining the meaning of specific texts in light of this larger context. All agree that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is the one passage of Scripture on which the position of restricting women from certain ministry roles rests most firmly. But whatever this text means, it must be weighed in the balance with all the other relevant biblical texts. In our judgment, when this is done it reveals that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is addressing a limited situation.²²

An important aspect of balanced interpretation is carefully considering one's starting point and the appropriate priority and significance that each relevant passage should have. For instance, it has often been taken for granted that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is the "control," or authoritative, text through which all the other texts on women in ministry must be read and interpreted. However, in our judgment it is better to approach 1 Timothy 2:11-15 through the cumulative evidence of all the other relevant texts—especially in light of 1 Timothy 2's complexity and apparent inconsistency with Paul's other teachings about women in ministry.

The Unclear in Light of the Clear

Another key principle of interpretation is to explain the meaning of the more obscure in light of the clearer. First Timothy 2:11-15 is in the category of the more obscure, uncertain, and difficult to understand. We must honestly acknowledge that we know too little about the specific circumstances of the letter and that Paul's argument contains too many ambiguous details for any interpreter to be able to pronounce the last word on what it means. But this conclusion in itself is significant: Given the broad range of interpretations of this passage and the lack of agreement about its meaning, how much weight should it be given in resolving an issue of such urgent importance in the life of the church?

Context and Application

It's extremely important to appreciate the complexity inherent in the interpretive task of moving from an authoritative ancient text to living out the Bible in our modern-day context. It's not as simple as just following the "plain" reading of the text. For example, right after Paul says, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands" (Eph. 5:22), he says, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters" (Eph. 6:5). Living out Ephesians 5:22 involves more than simply quoting the passage and moving on as if that settled the matter. In order to properly read these two

²² See Appendix C for a more detailed explanation of this passage.

passages as Scripture that speaks to us here and now we must take into account a variety of important contexts: the original historical context, the immediate literary context, the context of the whole canon of Scripture, and the relevant contemporary context.

Seeking Direction

On some issues the Bible doesn't give us a very clear and straightforward answer to our questions. There doesn't seem to be consistency and there aren't any passages that clearly resolve the various elements. In light of this, it's vitally important to keep in mind that the Bible tells a grand Story whose goal is the final realization of God's Kingdom in the new creation. The end of the Story is where everything is heading and we must read individual texts in light of this larger context and movement.

When we read the Bible, we are looking for the direction that the various relevant texts point when we consider them as a whole. This is an interpretive approach in which we do not assign equal significance to everything in Scripture, but in which we do seek to take account of everything in Scripture. There are parts of the Bible that seem to accept hierarchical structures. However, we believe a compelling argument can be made that the overall direction of God's purpose is toward the full equality of men and women in the new creation. In the Kingdom of God the values of the world are turned upside down. A central aspect of this is the reversal of status: the high are brought down and the low are lifted up. "The last will be first, and the first will be last."

Appendix C: Understanding the Two "Keep Silent" Passages

First Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 are the two primary texts used to argue against women preaching, teaching, and leading in the church. Since we believe the Bible teaches that women and men are to minister together in a full and equal partnership, we must provide an adequate, biblical explanation for these apparent prohibitions.

First Corinthians 14:34-35

First Corinthians 14:34-35 comes in the context of Paul emphasizing the importance of orderly worship: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

The first thing we must remember is that Paul has already stated earlier in this letter that women, as well as men, pray and prophesy as part of the worship gathering: "every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head" (1 Cor. 11:5). This by itself points to the idea that Paul is referring to a specific and limited kind of silence rather than a general and absolute silence. Commentators agree that this is a difficult passage to explain in context, and a number of suggestions have been made. This lack of clarity and consensus is an important point. As was discussed in Appendix B regarding 1 Timothy 2, a key principle of interpretation is to explain the meaning of the more obscure in light of the clearer. If there is

such a lack of clarity about what this text means, how much weight should it be given in resolving an issue of great importance in the life of the church?

The most common view today among those who oppose women speaking with authority in the church is that Paul is forbidding women from evaluating prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29). In this view, women may prophesy, but may not *judge* prophecy because that involves a higher level of speaking authority which is not open to women. There are two major problems with this view. First, the word “speak” in 1 Corinthians 14:34 doesn’t have the connotation of evaluating prophecy—neither the word itself nor the immediate context of verses 34-35. Second, the general concept of there being two levels of speech and that the higher, more authoritative level of evaluating prophecy is only for men is not found anywhere else in Paul’s writings. Indeed, Paul’s own explanation of prophecy in this chapter strongly suggests that prophecy is at the highest level of authoritative speech (14:1-25).

A more likely view is that Paul is referring to a specific and limited kind of silence for women. In context, it may be that Paul is forbidding women only from asking disruptive questions during the worship service. This fits exactly with the instruction Paul gives about how to solve the problem: “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home” (14:35). This view also agrees with the larger context of Paul’s concern for orderliness during the worship gathering so that people may be truly edified (14:26-40).

First Timothy 2:11-12

First Timothy 2:11-12 also comes in the context of Paul’s instructions on worship in the church: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.” The first thing to note is that in the immediately preceding context Paul prohibits elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold, pearls, and expensive clothes (v. 9). Most interpreters don’t consider these commands to be binding today in the strict literal sense because they were specific to Paul’s first century cultural context. But if these instructions are culturally bound and must be carefully applied to our present context, then the same process of interpretation and application ought to be followed with the instructions about women not teaching and holding authority.

If 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is interpreted as a general, universal, and timeless prohibition against women teaching and exercising authority in the church, it would be inconsistent with what Paul teaches and practices in his other letters, with what women actually did in the churches he planted, and with the other biblical evidence we have surveyed. If Paul intended all of his churches to follow this teaching, then why does he not mention it in any of his other letters, particularly his letter to Titus, in which he repeats his instructions regarding elders and deacons?

Our view is that Paul is addressing a specific, local situation in Ephesus, as he does so often in his letters. Is it just a coincidence that the one passage in Scripture that specifically prohibits women from teaching is addressed to the one church in which false teachers were successful in influencing women? False teaching was a major problem in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3-20; 4:1-7;

6:6-10, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:16-26; 3:5-13; 4:3-4), and the false teachers were trying to spread their teaching through women, who were generally less educated than men (2 Tim. 3:6-7).

In light of this situation, Paul applies the general principle of needing to learn in quiet submission before teaching to the uneducated Ephesian women who were being led astray by false teachers. When we apply this principle to our contemporary context it would apply to anyone who is more susceptible to false teaching, whether male or female. For it would be inaccurate to generalize and say that women today are always more prone than men to believe false teaching. This raises the fundamental interpretive issue of changing contexts and the question of how what was appropriate in the Greco-Roman world of the first century should be applied to our very different time and culture. In other words, even if we conclude that Paul prohibited women in Corinth and Ephesus from having authority over men in the church, does this necessarily mean that they shouldn't have it in twenty-first century Portland?

Those who believe women shouldn't teach or have authority over men respond to this by asserting that Paul bases his argument on a "creation principle" in Genesis, and, therefore, his prohibition is permanent and universal. However, simply referring to Adam and Eve doesn't make something a creation principle. The way these verses actually function in Paul's line of reasoning is to illustrate the situation in Ephesus by pointing out the parallels with the well-known story of Genesis 2 and 3. There is a danger inherent in the relationship between men and women, and Eve illustrates the way some Ephesian women were asserting their independence²³ and were susceptible to being deceived by false teaching. In this particular situation, the Ephesian women shouldn't be allowed to teach or have authority. Instead, they need, like Eve, to first learn in submission to God before they teach. The context and the nature of Paul's appeal to the story of Genesis 2 and 3 doesn't support elevating his argument to the level of a "creation principle."²⁴

²³ N. T. Wright sheds some light on the historical background of Paul's instructions: "One of the main things we know about religion in Ephesus is that the main religion--the biggest temple, the most famous shrine--was a female-only cult. The Temple of Artemis...was a massive structure that dominated the area. As befitted worshippers of a female deity, the priests were all women. They ruled the show and kept the men in their place.

"Now, if you were writing a letter to someone in a small, new religious movement with a base in Ephesus, and you wanted to say that because of the gospel of Jesus the old ways of organizing male and female roles had to be rethought from top to bottom, with one feature of that being that women were to be encouraged to study and learn and take a leadership role, you might well want to avoid giving the wrong impression. Was the apostle saying, people might wonder, that women should be trained so that Christianity would gradually become a cult like that of Artemis, where women led and kept the men in line? That, it seems to me, is what verse 12 is denying. The word I've translated as 'try to dictate to them' [NIV: 'assume authority'] is unusual but has overtones of 'being bossy' or 'seizing control.' Paul is saying, like Jesus in Luke 10 [the story of Mary sitting at Jesus' feet to learn from Him while Martha did the work], that women must have the space and leisure to study and learn in their own way, not in order that they may muscle in and take over the leadership as in the Artemis cult, but so that men and women alike can develop whatever gifts of learning, teaching, and leadership God is giving them."

²⁴ In 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, Paul refers to Adam and Eve to support his point about head coverings in worship. It's inconsistent to argue that 1 Timothy 2 is universal because it's based on a "creation principle" but that 1 Corinthians 11 is culturally bound, for Paul appeals to Genesis in very similar ways in these two passages.

Rebecca Merrill Groothuis sums up our view well:

“If 1 Timothy 2:11-15 can legitimately be understood as a prohibition relevant only for women in a historically specific circumstance (which it can), and if there is no other biblical text that explicitly forbids women to teach or have authority over men (which there is not), and if there *are* texts that assert the fundamental spiritual equality of women with men (which there are), then women who are not in the circumstance for which the 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibition was intended may safely follow whatever call they have to ministry” (as cited in Keener 235-6).

Appendix D: Qualifications for Elders

The qualifications for elders/overseers and deacons are described in 1 Timothy 3:1-12 and Titus 1:5-9. These qualifications are not job descriptions or gender-specific qualities, but rather moral and character qualifications. In the original Greek text, there are no masculine pronouns. Instead, Paul uses the generic pronoun *tis*, translated as “whoever” or “anyone.” A more literal translation of 1 Timothy 3:1-6 would read as follows:

“Trustworthy is the saying: Whoever [*tis*] aspires to [the office of] overseer desires a good work. It is necessary therefore that the overseer be without reproach, a “one-woman man” [literal translation], temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, apt at teaching, not an excessive drinker, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy; managing one’s household well, having children in subjection with all gravity—but if someone [*tis*] does not know how to manage one’s own family, how would one care for God’s church?—not a recent convert, lest being puffed up, one become conceited and fall into the devil’s snare” (Witt 319-20).

Aside from the expression “one-woman man,” there is nothing in this passage to indicate the sex of the overseer.²⁵ This phrase is translated variously as “the husband of one wife” (KJV, NASB, ESV), “married only once” (NRSV), and “faithful to his wife” (NIV). Does this mean that elders/overseers must be male? No, for the point is not about the sex of the person, but rather about them being exclusively faithful to their spouse. The close parallel with the later passage about a widow being a “one-man woman” (1 Tim. 5:9), indicates that both passages are referring to sexual fidelity in marriage.

The expression “one-woman man” does not imply that the person must be married and cannot be single. Nor do the following statements about managing one’s household and children imply that an elder/overseer must have children. Paul simply takes it for granted that the person would be married and have children, which was to be expected in first-century Greco-Roman households. In other words, the purpose of the phrase “one-woman man” is to disqualify adulterers from serving as elders/overseers, not to establish a minimum job requirement.

²⁵ The only person named by Paul as either an elder or a deacon is Phoebe, the female deacon (Rom. 16:1).

An important principle of biblical interpretation is to distinguish what in Scripture is *prescriptive*, embodying God’s commandment to us, and what is *descriptive*, relating events or attitudes that may or may not be desirable. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul addresses the cultural context of the first-century Greco-Roman world, but that doesn’t mean he is endorsing that particular social setting’s values and standards of behavior as being permanent and universal.

William G. Witt summarizes a mutualist interpretation of Paul’s teaching about the qualifications for elders:

“House churches were patterned along the lines of the Mediterranean household, and Paul would have assumed that the householder would be male, have children, and manage his household—although there would have been exceptions, such as Paul himself or ‘co-workers’ of Paul such as Priscilla and Aquila. At the same time, the requirements that Paul lists for the offices of overseer, elder, and deacon are *moral*; he provides no *prescriptive* job descriptions. Paul’s concern is that overseer/elder be a good moral example both to the church and to the surrounding pagan culture, manage the church as well as he manages his own household, and be above reproach or scandal. However, nothing that Paul writes would exclude a woman from fulfilling the same functions. Indeed, that Paul refers to ‘anyone’ (*tis*) when describing those eligible for these offices, uses no specifically male pronouns, and deliberately uses identical moral language to describe what he expects of women in the churches (including women deacons) and what he demands of office-holders, makes clear that there are no distinctive gender requirements for holding church office” (327).

Appendix E: The Doctrine of the Trinity

Many advocates of both the complementarian/hierarchical view and the egalitarian/mutualist view have used the doctrine of the Trinity as one of their arguments²⁶. For complementarians the Trinity shows us a picture of the Son and Spirit always in joyful submission to the Father despite the fact that each person of the Trinity is coequally God. Thus, women's submission to men in no way devalues them in their identity and relationship to God. Egalitarians, by contrast, emphasize the idea that the Trinity is a communion of equals participating together in divine authority and power.

²⁶ In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Paul seems to be saying that man is the glory of God and that woman is the glory of man. While some have based their Trinitarian interpretations on this passage, we find Paul to be using the argument of his critics against them in this passage. That is to say, he is correcting their misapplication of the Son's submission to the Father to the relationship between men and women. Moreover, in Ephesians 5:23—“the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church”—Paul is recapitulating the Old Testament teaching of God as husband to Israel and showing us that now Christ is a husband to the church. To stretch this picture into leadership functions in the church is to move beyond where the text allows us to go.

In our view, however, it is unhelpful to use the Trinity to support either argument related to human gender roles in the church. Even as the ecumenical creeds seek to articulate the relations among the members of the Trinity, they acknowledge the mystery of the Trinity and the inner life of the being who is one God in three persons. Accordingly, we believe that to draw strong parallels between how God the Son and God the Spirit relate to God the Father with how human men and women should relate to each other in ministry is stretching the doctrine of the Trinity beyond its proper scope of application. If both complementarians and egalitarians think the Trinity supports their arguments then it's an indication that the debate about women and men in the ministries of the church is not much improved by appealing to the doctrine of the Trinity.

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