

Rockharbor Resources

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

A Biblical Vision of Kingdom Partnership



Glenn Packiam

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

**Restoring a Biblical Vision of Kingdom
Partnership**

By Glenn Packiam

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PREFACE

What is a woman's role within the church? Can women preach and teach? Can women lead? Can women be pastors? Can women be elders?

For many people, simply raising these questions feels offensive. Why would we even have to ask? For others, the answers are settled truth, and the fact that we are wrestling with them again must be the result of shifting cultural tides. Yet these questions are not merely culturally urgent; they are theologically significant. Our responses to them are shaped by our view of creation, salvation, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the place of men and women within the community of faith. God created human beings as male and female. Recognizing the place of women within God's world and God's work directly impacts how we live out our faith and engage our mission.

The purpose of this book is to explore the role of women in church leadership. Questions related to women preaching will be addressed along the way. We will not, however, focus on

how husbands and wives are to relate to each other in the home, though questions about “headship” language will be addressed in Appendix A.

Before we proceed, it is important to lay some groundwork. Scripture is the foundation for our convictions. While cultural opinions shift and tides change, the Word of God is forever. Interpretations of Scripture, however, are not infallible. Interpretations of Scripture may be sorted into a few categories. At the highest order of importance are what may be called *creedal* issues—doctrine addressed throughout church history through creeds and councils about ontological matters—the very nature of God and humanity. In short, creedal issues define orthodox Christianity. One cannot be a Christian and contradict what the Nicene Creed says about Jesus, for example. The Nicene Creed—codified at the same council that confirmed which books belong in the New Testament and count as Christian Scripture—functions as guardrails for interpreting Scripture. It is like bowling alley bumper lanes for Bible reading. You can’t read the Bible in a way that denies the Trinity or the virgin birth and count it as a faithful Christian reading.

Secondly, there are *sacramental* issues. Disagreements of this order are about the nature of baptism, or the Lord’s Table, or marriage. These kinds of interpretative disagreements often result in divisions in churches and the splintering of denominations. Think of the denominations that exist because of the disagreement about infant baptism versus believer’s baptism, or about whether communion is the actual body and blood of Christ or a mystery and a memorial. These are

weighty and significant disagreements that must be taken seriously.

Thirdly, there are *convictional* issues. These are differences about the outworking of a doctrine or the details surrounding it. For example, the doctrine of the return of Christ might lead some to a view of a rapture, while others might reject it. There is disagreement about how Christ will return but agreement that He will. These differences represent different readings of Scripture but hold enough common ground for people to remain in the same church community. I propose that the subject matter of this ebook belongs in this level.

There is a fourth level that can be called *preferential* issues. These are not doctrinal in nature but rather philosophical and practical. They have to do with traditions and preferences, not theology. These are things like musical style, size of church, and more.

We may quibble about the labels for these layers. Still, it is important to sketch out the layers of theological interpretation, making distinctions between issues that define us as Christians and those that don't. It is also worth noting that these levels sometimes overlap. My hope in this ebook is for Christians who confess the Creed to engage in conversation with each other on these convictions in a charitable way. As one early Christian theologian put it, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity."

Having laid the groundwork for thinking theologically across several levels, we must now briefly discuss the role that culture plays in our interpretative lens.

The beauty of Christianity is that at the heart of our faith is a God who became flesh. More than that, faith in Christ is always “enfleshed” in a real community of Christ followers in actual space and time. There is no Christianity in a lab; there are only Christians in the world.

When it comes to convictions that go beyond the core Christian doctrines addressed by the creeds, church traditions and practice shape our view. However, church traditions and practice can be corrupted by prejudices and priorities that do not reflect the heart of God revealed in the Bible and in Jesus. The only way to hold our cultural lens up for examination is to compare it against other cultural contexts across the world and throughout church history. Since we cannot compare our time to future times, we must study history to have something to judge our era against. This is the only way to prevent us from becoming prisoners of the cultural moment.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that cultural corruption is not a modern phenomenon. Every era of church history has been susceptible to corruption and compromise. For our discussion in this ebook, the question is this: *Are we changing our view of women in ministry leadership because of contemporary cultural tides of feminism, or is a view of male-only ministry leadership the result of centuries of patriarchal culture that corrupted the practice of the early church?*

The goal of this ebook is to gain a Biblical vision of Kingdom partnership between men and women in ministry, focusing on what God designed women to do, what Jesus dignified women to do, and what the Spirit empowered women to do. We are attempting not a revision but a retrieval and recovery.

Finally, let me offer few words about the hermeneutical methodology—the approach to interpretation. When reading the Bible to formulate a “biblical theology” of a particular issue, it is important to give weight to the “whole counsel” of Scripture and not just a few isolated verses. Using Scripture to interpret Scripture, we want to immerse ourselves in the grand narrative and big themes before looking for specific imperatives and particular points of application. That requires starting with what is clear and then moving from the clear to the unclear. [i] We will start with what can be observed from a plain reading of the meta-themes within the metanarrative of the Bible. As we zoom in, we aim to enter the world of Jesus and the gospels, and then the world of the early Christians in the New Testament era, paying attention to the way those early Christian communities operated and the place of women within them. The interpretative method is essentially this: Genesis (creation and fall), Jesus (redemption), and church (early Christian practice).[ii]

We will begin by outlining popular terms that frame contemporary discussions of the issue, and then suggest alternate terms that help capture the essence of our perspective clearly and intuitively. The journey through the text will begin with the Genesis account of creation and fall. From there, we will look at how Jesus interacted with women as a

sign of how salvation and new creation begin to reverse the effects of the curse of sin and death. Next will come an overview of women and the work of the Holy Spirit, paying attention to how the Spirit forms the church as one new family in Jesus. Then, we will examine how women operated within the early church, placing special focus on key figures like Lydia, Apphia, Nympha, Prisca, Phoebe, and Junia. Finally, we will discover how leadership functioned in the New Testament churches. We will try to draw these threads together in the conclusion. To close, Appendix A will address questions about “headship” as mentioned in Paul’s letters, and Appendix B will deal specifically with 1 Timothy 2, a text that seems to forbid women from preaching, teaching, and leading.

❑ That is the reason 1 Timothy 2 will be examined in Appendix B as opposed to the main chapters of the ebook.

❑ It may help readers to know that applying this method to other issues that contemporary cultural currents might push us toward—like affirming same-sex marriage or relationships, for example—yields a view that contradicts so-called progressive views rather than confirms them. Nothing in Genesis, Jesus, or early Christian practice would allow for a view that blesses same-sex marriage or same-sex relationships.

CHAPTER 1

TERMINOLOGY

The discussion about gender roles in the church and the home is often framed using two terms: complementarian and egalitarian. The complementarian position is generally associated with belief in male “headship,” where men and women are equal in value and worth but different in roles, with women taking subordinate roles to men. The egalitarian position also champions the equality of men and women but is associated with an interchangeability of roles. However, the terms can be unhelpful because they do not always communicate what they intend. For example, to believe in complementarity between the genders—that there are intentionally designed differences that complement each other, and that male and female were created as paired counterparts—does not automatically mean belief in a gender-based hierarchy.

Similarly, to say that men and women are equal or that gender roles can be more fluid than traditional social norms might indicate does not automatically mean that men and women are identical or interchangeable. Furthermore, these terms have

become markers of identity, with battle lines drawn between two camps.

For all the reasons above and more, scholars like Lucy Peppiatt and others have adopted the terms hierarchicalist instead of complementarian and mutualist instead of egalitarian. What is helpful about this re-framing is that it highlights the real crux of the debate: Does God intend there to be a gender-based hierarchy? Are men and women intended to relate to each other through a built-in hierarchy of the genders, where women are inherently subordinate?^[i] Yet, there are limitations to these labels. To label a view as hierarchical feels like an insult right off the bat, especially when contrasted with such a winsome term as mutualist. Many self-described complementarians would view the relationship between men and women in a home or in a church as a partnership in the way it functions, despite a professed belief in a structure of male headship. In other words, a complementarian and an egalitarian might strive for mutuality in practice.

Since the term egalitarian runs the risk of implying that there are no differences between genders, and since the real point of tension in the discussion is about gender-based hierarchy, the key desired features of male and female partnership in Kingdom work and in the church are equality, complementarity, and mutuality. I propose that the best term to describe a view that holds these features together is a *non-hierarchical complementarian*, or a belief in *non-hierarchical complementarity*. One might also opt for a descriptive sentence such as the following: “We believe in a partnership of equality, complementarity, and mutuality between men and

women in all areas of ministry and all levels of leadership in the church.”

ii. To clarify, hierarchy as an organizational structure is not automatically problematic. Part of reflecting God’s wise and loving rule into the world as His image-bearers is to bring order and structure. Good order and structure bring about peace and prosperity. Of course, that same structure can be a cover for power over others rather than a means of serving others and ensuring their flourishing. Nevertheless, what we are naming here is a gender-based hierarchy.

CHAPTER 2

WOMEN & CREATION

Genesis 1 narrates the creation of the world in poetic fashion, listing paired counterparts that belong together: day and night, heaven and earth, land and sea, and so on. The pinnacle of the account is the creation of another pair: male and female. Men and women are created to be different yet similar, counterparts as pairs that belong together. Men and women are not interchangeable. They are connected yet distinct.

What unites male and female is their status as God's image-bearers. Both men and women are created in the image of God. The Bible does not speak of the image of God in gendered terms. "God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them" (Gen. 1:27, CEB). Being God's image means carrying an inherent dignity. Every life—regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or ability—has intrinsic value simply by virtue of being God's image. Being God's image also implies a delegated authority. Humans are made in God's image to serve

as God’s representatives in the created world. Both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 link the creation of human beings with their authority in God’s world. This authority also implies a missional purpose. God created human beings—both men and women—with a job to do! This is articulated in Genesis as cultivating fruitfulness and flourishing from the world.

When Genesis 2 describes the creation of male and female from another perspective, the storyteller begins by describing a single “human” or “earthling” (literal translation of “adam”). Yet it was not good for this human to be solitary or alone. A “helper” was needed (Gen. 2:18, CEB). The word used for helper is *ezer*, which can also mean deliverer. In fact, *ezer* is used of God by Israel often in the Old Testament. It is not an “administrative assistant,” “junior guard,” or “deputy chief.” The *ezer* might even be the stronger partner in the relationship. Old Testament scholar Carmen Imes writes that “‘*Ezer*’ is primarily used in military contexts and is best translated as ‘ally.’”^[1]

The context of Genesis 2 gives us a picture for how to interpret *ezer*. Another word is used: “partner” (Gen. 2:18, 20, NRSV). This Hebrew word, *kenegdo*, means she “corresponds to him,” which is why Imes suggests ditching the phrase “opposite sex” in favor of “counterpart.”^[2] From the rib of the “human” (*adam*), God fashions a “woman” (*ishshah*); then, having named “woman,” the human names himself as “man” (*ish*). In other words, the story begins with a human or earthling, and then when from his ribs comes another, there is now gendered difference—woman and man; or, we could say, wife and husband.

The Bible records it this way: “The human said, ‘This one finally is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh. She will be called a woman because from a man she was taken’” (Gen. 2:23, CEB). Note the equality and mutuality. By the creation of gendered difference, each develops a distinct identity. Male is not recognized as male without the female counterpart; female is not recognized as female without the male counterpart. This identity points toward relationship— union. Hence the use of the Hebrew words *ish* and *ishshah*, which are often meant as husband and wife. The creation from the side also symbolizes the side-by-side standing of men and women. In sum, when Genesis 2 describes the creation of male and female with more poetic detail, it paints a picture of equality (side), mutuality (male and female are only recognizable as such as counterparts to each other), and unity (marriage physically unites the male and female bodies).

It is not until Genesis 3 that the equality, mutuality, and unity between male and female gets undermined. When the serpent tempts the woman by contradicting God’s words, Eve takes the fruit, eats it, and gives it to her husband. When God finds them, the man blames the woman, and the woman blames the snake. The unity and order of all creation is quickly fragmented. We see this in several dimensions at once: the God-human relationship, the male-female relationship, the human-animal relationship, and the human-earth relationship.

As judgment for their disobedience, God hardens these fractures: the serpent will crawl on the ground, the woman will have pain in childbearing, the land will work against the man’s attempts to cultivate it (turning work into toil), and more. What

is significant, however, is that the male-female relationship will also be set in its fractured state. The woman will “desire” her husband—a word used with sinister intentions connected to manipulation and control (cf. Gen. 4:7); and the husband will “rule” over his wife—a word with overtones of dominion. To say it plainly, the war of manipulation and domination between the sexes is a result of the Fall and part of the curse. This tension is framed for the first time through the introduction of hierarchy between male and female.

But the curse is God holding the fracture in its place until he can reset the bone. This is not God’s final word on any of the brokenness in the world that resulted from sin.

[1]. Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God’s Image: Why Creation Still Matters* (InterVarsity Press, 2023), 40.

[2]. Imes, *Being God’s Image: Why Creation Still Matters*, p. 35.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN & JESUS

Jesus is the Word of God (John 1, CEB). He is the very wisdom and logic of God. If we want to know what God thinks about a subject, we need to look first and look fully at the life of Jesus. Jesus is God's last Word on any subject.

So, what does Jesus reveal about the place and purpose of women?

To begin with, Jesus is born of a woman with no earthly or human father. This in itself is an elevation of women. It is a clue to the reversal of the curse—a curse that specifically mentions childbearing—that would come through his life. Amy Peeler has expressed it poignantly:

Jesus, born of a woman is male. The incarnation reverses Eden, where a woman came from a man, Both participated equally in sin, and both were found guilty. Now, the ultimate man is born of a woman, and both of them model obedient surrender to God.^[1]

That the incarnation would occur through a woman and her womb is a demonstration that Eve—the first “mother”—would not be doomed for her sin. Through her faithful obedience, Mary participates in God’s promised “seed” arriving to crush the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15, CEB). He was not only revealed as the Son of God to a woman—Mary—but also recognized by another woman, Elizabeth, because her unborn child, John the Baptist, leaped in her womb upon encountering Mary when she was pregnant with Jesus.

In his life and ministry, Jesus embodied a revolutionary and inclusive perspective that challenged the norms of his day. He consistently engaged with and elevated women throughout his ministry. Jesus listened to his mother at the wedding in Cana; he healed a woman who had been bound for many years and addressed her as a daughter of Abraham; he spoke to a Samaritan woman at the well, revealing himself as the Messiah—an encounter that is reminiscent of God’s revelation to and covenant with Hagar in Exodus. Jesus also became close friends with Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus to the extent that he visited them when Lazarus died and spent time in their home afterward. Some of the most profound moments of revelation about Jesus’ identity and sacrificial mission were given to women, like the woman in Mark 14 who anoints Jesus for his death, and whose story Jesus said would be told wherever the gospel is preached.

Jesus’s interactions with women were marked by compassion, equality, and inclusivity. Throughout his life and ministry, he engaged in meaningful conversations with women from diverse backgrounds, transcending cultural and social barriers.

Then, after the resurrection, Jesus calls Mary by name, reminding her of her dignity and worth and reestablishing her place in the community.

Most significantly, Jesus entrusted women with the pivotal task of proclaiming his resurrection to his male disciples. Keep in mind that in the first century, a woman's testimony was not typically admissible in court. Yet, Jesus entrusts the most significant event in history to female witnesses. By commissioning women as the first messengers, Jesus affirmed not only the dignity, but also the authority and purpose that women carry as image-bearers. Jesus had risen; the curse had been broken. Women could now be who they were created to be!

[i]. Amy Peeler, "Amy Peeler: The First and Second Adam and Eve – Gender and Representative Humanity – Christ and Culture," December 13, 2022, <https://cfc.sebts.edu/faith-and-culture/amypeeler-first-second-adam-eve-gender/>. Quoted and summarized in Carmen Joy Imes, *Being God's Image: Why Creation Still Matters* (InterVarsity Press, 2023) 111.

CHAPTER 4

WOMEN & THE HOLY SPIRIT

In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit is poured out on the followers of Jesus on the day of a Jewish feast known as Pentecost. In the Old Testament, Pentecost was the feast that marked the giving of the law, the day God gave the commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. It was celebrated fifty days after Passover, which was the feast that marked the day God passed over the firstborn Israelite sons as he brought down judgment on firstborn Egyptian sons. Passover was the day God dealt with evil and delivered His people, and Pentecost was the day God taught His people to live like they were His people.

Yet the weakness of the first covenant is that it did not have the power to produce the life it revealed. God knew that, and as Paul explained to the Galatians, God designed the Law to function as a guardian and a guardrail for a time. But in the “fullness of time,” Jesus came to fulfill the covenant and renew it in such a fresh and powerful way that the best way to describe it is as a *new* covenant. Not only did the new

covenant provide forgiveness once and for all through the blood of Jesus, it also opened the way for *all* people—not just Jewish people under the first covenant—to be part of God’s family. Better still, the new covenant included the long-awaited promised outpouring of God’s Spirit, who gives the power to desire and to do God’s will (Eph. 2:12-13, CEB).

In Acts 2, Peter connects the day of Pentecost to the promise in Joel 2: “In the last days, God says, ‘I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. Even upon my servants, men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18, CEB). Notice that the Spirit is being poured out on *all* people. Notice that the prophet Joel and Peter make a point of saying that sons *and* daughters will prophesy, and then they say it again in verse 18.

The result of Pentecost is clear: the new covenant is fully here because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, a new community has been formed in which men and women receive power to be witnesses to the good news.

Just as the outpouring of the Spirit was for both men and women, so the gifts of the Spirit are not gendered. In the various New Testament texts about spiritual gifts (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12, 14, CEB), there is no distinction between gifts for men and gifts for women. There is also no ranking of gifts in any order of importance or esteem. In Romans 12:6-8 (CEB), Paul offers a list of spiritual gifts. “...If your gift is prophecy, you

should prophesy in proportion to your faith. If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.”

Note the gifts of teaching, exhortation, and leading are not distinguished from serving or giving. They are not even listed in any sort of hierarchical rank or order of importance. He simply begins by saying, “We have different gifts that are consistent with God’s grace that has been given to us (Rom. 12:6a, CEB).

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul’s list of gifts includes a word of wisdom—which may be the kind of gift at work in preaching and teaching—along with gifts like a word of knowledge, faith, healing, performing miracles, discerning of spirits, and tongues and interpretation. Again, the list is not in order of importance. Paul introduces them this way: “There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:4-7, CEB). Paul deliberately undercuts the tendency to give more honor to some gifts over others by using a metaphor of the human body. “Christ is just like the human body—a body is a unit and has many parts; and all the parts of the body are one body, even though there are many” (1 Cor. 12:12, CEB). The gifts are not gendered or ranked. The outpouring of the Spirit radically levels the playing field and empowers everyone to get in the game.

One final gift is worthy of particular attention. The New Testament says that *all* should *eagerly desire* spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 14:1, CEB). Prophecy in the Bible is not primarily about predicting the future. In fact, it rarely is. Even in the Old Testament, when the prophets announce what God will do (which accounts for about 7% of Old Testament prophetic speech), it's an announcement of God's action not a prediction.^[1] Prophecy is declaring the word of God to the people of God. This is especially obvious in the New Testament as prophetic speech is revelatory speech about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Prophecy is described as the testimony of Jesus; to prophesy is to bear witness to who Jesus is (Rev. 19:10). Paul spoke of the gospel as a mystery that had been concealed in the past but revealed now to “the prophets” (Eph. 3:5-6, CEB). This refers to the apostles, who, by the Spirit's power, were now recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, the Lord and Christ. Thus, the Spirit-empowered proclamation of Jesus is a gift that every follower of Jesus should desire.

The Spirit is poured out on men *and* women. The gifts of the Spirit are given for the building up of the church, for our witness to the world, and for the glory of God. Just as the body functions best when all its parts are healthy and thriving, so the church is at its best when every member—women and men—are being filled by the Spirit in an ongoing way and are operating in the various gifts, ministries, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit's work.

[1]. This insight comes from an email exchange with Carmen Imes.

CHAPTER 5

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In the New Testament, we see women present and active in the life of the church. Here are just a few of the women named in Acts and in Paul's letters: Priscilla (Prisca), Junia, Phoebe, Lydia, Persis, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Julia, Euodia, Synthche, Apphia, Nympha, Tabitha, Chloe, Lois, Eunice, Claudia, Nereus's sister, and Rufus's mother. Scholars Carolyn Osiek, Margaret MacDonald, and Janet Tulloch point out that many of the women mentioned in the New Testament, in the first century bishop Ignatius's letters, and in other Christian documents from the first and second centuries are named with no reference to a relationship to a man, a fact that is striking in light of "that culture's obsession with classifying women by sexual status."¹ For some of these women, we have additional insight into the roles they fulfilled.

WOMEN AS HOUSE CHURCH LEADERS

In Philippi, Lydia was a business owner and a God-fearing pagan who came to faith in Jesus. It seems that Lydia, perhaps through her father's will or husband's passing, was relatively wealthy and the manager of her household. She hosts Paul and Silas at her home as they begin their ministry in the city. After Paul and Silas were arrested and released, Acts 16:40 says they "made their way to Lydia's house where they encouraged the brothers and sisters." This gives us a clue that Lydia was not simply the host for the church in Philippi, but a leader within that community. Gordon Fee helps us understand the role of household managers and the churches that met in their homes:

...where they would gather in the atrium, the semipublic area where business was regularly carried on, the householder would naturally serve as the leader of the house church. That is, by the very sociology of things, it would never have occurred to them that a person from outside the household would come in and lead what was understood as simply an extension of the household. *To put it plainly, the church is not likely to gather in a person's house unless the householder also functioned as its natural leader.* Thus, Lydia would have held the same role in the church in her house as she did as master of the household.^[1]

Two other women who, by the same token, would have been leaders of churches are Apphia and Nympha. Apphia is

mentioned as a cohost and co-leader of the church to which Philemon belonged, hosted, and co-led: “From Paul, who is a prisoner for the cause of Christ Jesus, and our brother Timothy. To Philemon our dearly loved coworker, Apphia our sister, Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church that meets in your house.” Nijay Gupta writes that it is reasonable to “assume Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus were, in effect, co-leaders of their church community which met in Philemon’s house.”^[iii] Nympha, however, is mentioned as a host and leader of the church in Laodicea. She is the “only known and named Christian from first-century Laodicea,” a church significant enough for Jesus to address in Revelation 3.^[iv] It seems that Paul had also written a letter to her and to the church in her home. “Say hello to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, along with Nympha and the church that meets in her house. After this letter has been read to you publicly, make sure that the church in Laodicea reads it and that you read the one from Laodicea” (Col. 4:15-16, CEB).

Also in the church in Philippi were the female “co-workers” Euodia and Syntyche, whom Paul address in his letter to the Philippians: “I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to come to an agreement in the Lord. Yes, and I’m also asking you, loyal friend, to help these women who have struggled together with me in the ministry of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the scroll of life” (Phil. 4:2-3, CEB). Note that Paul identifies them as women who have “struggled” alongside him, a phrase he used of others in Romans 16, denoting a kind of “foxhole friendship” for Kingdom causes that had been forged through shared trials and toil. These are not women fighting over the flower

arrangement or the color of the carpet; these are key ministry partners whose unity is critical for the community in Philippi.

So far, we have examined five women in two significant cities who led or co-led significant churches in their homes or the homes of their co-leaders hosting house churches: Lydia, Euodia, and Synteché in Philippi; Apphia (with Philemon and Archippus) in Colossae; and Nympha in Laodicea. Three more women are worthy of study.

PHOEBE AS PAUL'S PROXY

The first is Phoebe, who is trusted to carry and convey the message of Paul's letter to the church in Rome, the letter we call Romans. In the ancient world, there were no mail-carrying services. If you wanted to communicate with someone far away, you needed to send a trusted person—a servant or relative—to carry the letter. The risks were that sensitive information would be leaked or compromised and that fake letters and forged documents would be delivered in a sender's name. Thus, a personal commendation for the message-carrier was essential. There are many examples of these commendations in the Greco-Roman world. We see them in Paul's letters as well with his commendations of Epaphroditus and the letter to the Philippians, and of Tychicus in the letter to the Colossians.

We are introduced to Phoebe in Romans 16: "I'm introducing our sister Phoebe to you, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. Welcome her in the Lord in a way that is worthy of God's people, and give her whatever she needs from you,

because she herself has been a sponsor of many people, myself included” (Rom. 16:1-2, CEB).

There are three key words and phrases Paul uses. The first is “sister.” This could be a generic statement about her relationship in the family of God; however, because it occurs in a commendation passage, it has a weight that is comparable to Paul’s references to “brother Timothy” (2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 3:2, CEB), whom Paul wants the church to see as his equal and co-writer or message-sender; “brother Titus” (2 Cor. 2:13, CEB); and “brother Tychichus” and “brother Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25, CEB), who are also letter carriers. New Testament scholar Nijay Gupta sees in each of these a “technical meaning” where Paul is recognizing their “peer status.”^[M] It’s a shorthand way of saying, “This person is just like me.” In short, by calling her “sister,” Paul is recognizing her as his proxy.

Secondly, Paul names her as a deacon or servant. Rather than viewing this as a concrete office or title since titles were fluid in the New Testament era (as we will see below), it is better to see it as a description of her function as a servant of the Lord and of His church. The word is used in Romans 13 to describe how city authorities (magistrates, judges, and others) were actually servants of God. The term is used again in Romans 15 to describe how Jesus became a servant on behalf of God’s truth. “When we put all of these occurrences of this language together, it is obvious that Paul was paying honor and respect to Phoebe, but not as a ‘deacon’ (if by that we mean a title with specific tasks that are menial or hold little or no authority). He was treating her as someone like himself, dedicated to the

hard work of ministry, not least in her tireless efforts to support Paul's mission in Rome."^[vi]

Thirdly, Phoebe is described as a sponsor or benefactor of Paul and of many others. The Greek word here is *prostatis*, a word used of a patron who supported others in need.^[vii] In a first-century Roman context, "this was terminology used for someone of power and status serving as guardian and protector of a person or a group. A *prostatis* was someone who stepped in with resources and influence to aid someone in need."^[viii] Phoebe was likely a person of means and social status who, like Christ, became low in order to be a servant of the Lord and of the church.

One final comment needs to be made of Phoebe. As the person who carried the letter of Romans, she was also the one responsible for conveying its message. It is not a stretch to say that she was entrusted to be the first interpreter and preacher of Paul's most theologically rich letter.

PRISCA AS A TEACHER

We first meet Prisca (by her nickname Priscilla) in Acts 18, where she is introduced as the wife of Aquila. Both are from Italy and had arrived in Corinth after the emperor Claudius had ordered Jews to leave the city of Rome. Near the end of the chapter, the couple is named twice as ones who traveled and ministered with Paul, but this time, she is named first. Acts 18:18-19, CEB, "Then, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila, he sailed away to Syria. After they arrived in Ephesus, he left Priscilla and Aquila and entered the synagogue and interacted

with the Jews.” Then, when we are introduced to a popular rising teacher named Apollos, Luke tells us that when “Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they received him into their circle of friends and explained to him God’s way more accurately” (Acts 18:26, CEB). Once again, she is named first, this time in the context of teaching and coaching. This might seem like a trivial detail, but it is significant given the context of the Roman world. Gupta summarizes scholarship on this (*italics added for emphasis*):

In the Greco-Roman world, it was standard practice to list the husband’s name before that of his wife probably to recognize the head of household. However, a study of thousands of Roman epitaphs shows a small percentage of exceptions where the wife was named first. In many such cases, the wife held citizenship while her husband was a slave. There does not appear to be a particular set of rules around name order, but this research does acknowledge that name order is an indicator of status or prominence in some way.^[ix]

Of the six occasions where their names are mentioned closely together, Prisca is named first four times (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19, CEB). Commenting on the passage at the end of Acts 18 where they pull Apollos aside, a later fourth-century church father named John Chrysostom said that she “perfected him as a teacher.”^[ix] Even before that, another church father from the second century named Ammonius used this story as evidence that it was women who passed on the faith. It is slightly amusing to think that since many personal homes would have had small libraries, perhaps Prisca and

Aquilla had a small collection of apostolic texts and traditions. So, by taking him to their home, they were really taking him to school!

JUNIA AS AN APOSTLE

Junia has come into prominence now thanks to scholars like Scot McKnight, Lynn Cohick, Richard Bauckham, Eldon Epp, Lucy Peppiatt, and Cindy Westfall who have helped us pay attention to her significance in the New Testament church. But it was not always this way. For a time, there seemed to be a conspiracy against her, with scribes changing her name to a male form, Junius, though the male form of the name does not appear in any other ancient document. We first meet Junia in Romans 16: “Say hello to Andronicus and Junia, my relatives and my fellow prisoners. They are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me” (Rom. 16: 7, CEB).

Several early church fathers took this description in Romans 16 as clear, remarkable praise for an apostolic couple. In the fourth century, John Chrysostom remarked,

To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles—just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle! But even here he does not stop, but adds another song

of praise besides, and says, ‘Who were also in Christ before me.’^[xii]

Ambrosiaster (fourth century) also attested that Junia was an *apostolos*, as did Theodoret of Cyprus (fifth century), who saw the title as denoting not simply ordinary teachers but ones among the apostles. One early church father from the second century went a step further, suggesting that this couple were actually part of the original seventy-two whom Jesus sent out (Greek *apostello*). This fits with Paul’s identification of them as “fellow Jews” and his commendation of them as being Christians before he was.

Finally, Andronicus and Junia were marked as fellow prisoners. This would have meant that they were bold in their proclamation of the gospel, bold enough to have been viewed as a threat to society or guilty of civil disturbances, just as Paul, Peter, and many of the other apostles had been. Their devotion to Christ and their commitment to live as “sent out ones” marked them as apostles. Paul defines his own apostleship by these marks: sent by the risen Christ and suffered for the name of Christ.

WOMEN IN ACTION

In the New Testament, we see women leading house churches, teaching and preaching, prophesying, operating in the gifts of the Spirit, and serving in a variety of capacities. They are partners in the work of the ministry, co-laborers in Christ. At times, they are even the hosts and benefactors for the mission. In short, women are present and active in every way in the life

of the church. The reversal of the curse in Eden and the restoration of God’s design in creation of equality, mutuality, and complementarity is on full display in the radical new community of Jesus followers.

[\[ii\]](#). Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald, and Janet H. Tulloch, *A Women’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, 2006, loc. 88-95; Kindle.

[\[iii\]](#). Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 73.

[\[iiii\]](#). Nijay K. Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (Intervarsity Press, 2023), 108-109.

[\[iv\]](#). Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 110.

[\[v\]](#). Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 123.

[\[vi\]](#). Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 118.

[\[vii\]](#). Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 119.

[\[viii\]](#). Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 119.

[\[ix\]](#). Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, footnote on pp. 129-130. See also Marleen Boudreau Flory, “Where Women Precede Men: Factors Influencing the Order of Names in Roman Epitaphs, *The Classical Journal* 79, no. 3, 1984: 216-24, whom Gupta is summarizing.

[\[x\]](#). John Chrysostom, as quoted in Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 137.

[\[xi\]](#). John Chrysostom, *Homily on Romans*. 31. [PG], quoted in Peppiatt, “Women” in *IVP Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pp. 1131-1132

[\[xii\]](#). John Chrysostom, as quoted in Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 144.

CHAPTER 6

LEADERSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

In the New Testament era, the most significant shift in leadership was that it was no longer defined along hereditary family lines. Christians did not pass down the priesthood through their children, as was the case with Israel in the Old Testament. Here in the new covenant, a new way of thinking about leadership was emerging. The Holy Spirit called individuals to certain roles and functions, and the community of Christians confirmed it through the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:4, CEB). “The invocation of the Holy Spirit implies not only that there was a process of selection but also a ritual for setting the elders apart for their distinctive service...In the Church the ministers had to be chosen from mature and able members of the congregation and invested with authority.”^[1]

DEACONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA

What did church leadership look like in the New Testament era? Aren't there terms designated by Paul? Wayne Meeks, speaking of the term "apostle," cautions against seeing terms as "offices" but rather as a "set of 'functions that carried authority in the missionary activities of the Christians.'"^[iii] A good rule of thumb when considering the terms or titles in the New Testament is to think in terms of function versus status.

The first term to explore is *diakonos*, or deacon. Set aside modern notions of a deacon in the church and begin instead with the purest meaning of the word: a servant. In the ancient world, some pagan religious officers were called by this term. A scholar named John Collins has extensively researched the term and its usage in the Greco-Roman world, concluding that the word did not carry the "assumption of the accomplishment of (merely) menial tasks."^[iii] Its essential meaning was a mediator or spokesperson for someone else. Christians used the term to show an imitation of the mentality of Jesus, who took the form of a servant (see Phil. 2, CEB). Whether or not the term was used as a title is hard to say, though there are two instances where Paul uses the term in what appears to be a reference to a specific office of leadership: Phoebe is called a deacon in Romans 16:1, and Paul addresses the overseers and deacons of the church in Philippians 1:1. Nijay Gupta concludes that it is likely that deacons "served under the leadership of the overseers and met the ministry needs of the church."^[iv]

In summary, a deacon is someone who does the work of the ministry with the authority and humility of Jesus. The fact that

women are included as deacons means that women were involved in the real, on-the-ground work of ministry in the early church.

OVERSEERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA

The word for overseer is *episkopos*, and it seems to carry an official function. From Paul's charge to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, along with his mention of the term in the opening address of his letter to the Philippians, it seems that *episkopoi* "played more of an oversight or advisory function," while the *diakonoi* carried out the work of the ministry.^[4]

It is important to note two things. First, Paul uses the language of "overseer" sparingly (six times), compared to "deacon" (twenty-nine times). Secondly, no person is named as an *episkopos*, so we have no way to say it was restricted by gender. The qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 appear to be addressed to men because of how a phrase in verse 2 is translated: "the husband of one wife" (ESV). But the phrase can be understood as referring to marital fidelity. The Greek is literally "one wife husband," which is why the NRSV translates it as "married only once," and the CEB puts it as "faithful to their spouse." Verse 4 refers to an elder being a good household manager, which would be a fair expectation of a man or a woman.

ELDERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ERA

Today, the term elder carries images of a board of trustees who govern the operations of a church. But for the early

Christians, the reference would have been to a community of wisdom—the sages of society—in Israelite life, as seen throughout the Old Testament. Gupta writes, “Unlike ‘overseers’ (*episkopos*) and ‘ministry provider’ (*diakonos*), ‘elder’ is not primarily a functionary, so it’s not really a job description. Traditionally, the elders of a clan or a village were the wise, older figures who shared their wisdom and took responsibility for the well-being of the community.” After all, the basic meaning of the term *presbyteros* is, “older person.”^[vi]

This is why the imminent church historian Robert Louis Wilken notes that the terms “elder” (*presbyter*) and “overseer” (*episkopos*) are used in the New Testament inter-changeably. “In time the term *episkopos* would become the Greek word for ‘bishop,’ and *presbyter* would become ‘priest,’ but at this stage the two terms were used without distinction for members of a council of elders.”^[vii] An elder may also be an overseer. In fact, an overseer would have also been qualified as an elder. Elder may be seen as the “general term for those church leaders who were responsible for taking care of the community and giving it guidance, wisdom, and direction.”^[viii] Put it this way: “elder” is an authority borne of maturity; it is a stage of life more than it is a status in an organization. Furthermore, elders are a plurality, a collective. In the Bible, elders are always “addressed collectively,” and they “speak collectively.”^[ix]

In sum, elders are a leadership collective of older people with wisdom, maturity, and a good reputation in the faith community. When you consider the creational design of men and women working together as paired counterparts, the

occurrence of pairs in general, and pairings of men and women in particular in both Luke's gospel and the book of Acts, it would be easy to imagine that such a leadership collective would be composed of both men and women.

FUNCTIONAL ROLES AND THE RISE OF FORMAL OFFICES

Scholars like Scot McKnight and Nijay Gupta have remarked that Paul's term of choice for those doing the work of the ministry was "co-worker" or "co-laborer." The Greek word is *sunergos*, which is connected to our word "synergy." It's the notion of working together, pairing your energy with someone else's. It would be the word for our idiom of a team all "pulling in the same direction". It appears thirteen times in the New Testament—less than half as often as *diakonos* (servant, twenty-nine times) but more than twice as often as *episkopos* (overseer, six times) and just slightly less than double *presbyteros* (elder, seven times). Think about this. When the writers of the New Testament want to talk about roles in the church, they use words that denote function forty-two times and stage of life (elder) or office (overseer) a combined thirteen times. This emphasis is why several scholars like Meeks, Gupta, McKnight, and more urge us to pay attention to function over status.

It is only later that the church begins to give more formality to certain "offices." By the early second century, the church's structure began to change. A system of elders gave way to a single office of bishop, "who acted in concert with a council of presbyters."^[x]

One early church father from that era, Ignatius, was an “early witness to what is called the *monoepiskopos*, one bishop as head of the local church.”^[xi] Though it took time for this to catch on in larger cities, eventually within the second century, “the principle of one bishop for a city gradually took hold, and by the end of the century it had become almost universal.”^[xii]

There were many good reasons for this. For one, a singular bishop “was the sign of the unity of the Church. As Ignatius put it, there is one Eucharist, one altar, one cup, one Christ, and one bishop. There could be no liturgical celebration, no communal action, no public teaching except in fellowship with the bishop.”^[xiii] In contrast to a pagan priest whose function was mainly to perform rituals, “the bishop was overseer of the community (hence the title *pascepos*) and teacher, as well as priest. He was responsible for caring for orphans, widows, and the poor. The bishop kept in touch with other bishops through correspondence, and later, as church-wide disputes arose, bishops came together (in what came to be called a synod or council) to resolve conflicts.”^[xiv] Ignatius outlined the structure this way: “Let the bishop preside in God’s place, and the presbyters take the place of the apostolic council, and let the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ.”^[xv]

Eventually, these defined offices acquired more status and esteem. With the passing of time, women were gradually eclipsed from holding these high-status official offices, and the role of bishops came to be nearly exclusively male.^[xvi] A case can be made that these changes are the result of the corruption of human nature, a power struggle that tips toward

male domination, as was prophesied in Genesis 3 as a result of the Fall.

Whatever we think of the history of these offices, it is clear that these designations are far less formal in New Testament times than they would become. It is also a curious thing to note that while some interpreters have taken great care with descriptions about an elder being the husband of one wife (arguing that elders must presumably be male), they have taken far less seriously the ordering of offices, and the way the offices function or relate to each other.^[xvii] Perhaps it is helpful to remember that these titles were less prescriptive and more descriptive of a growing community of Jesus followers adapting and adjusting to their context, borrowing offices and functions from the Greco-Roman world but adding their own twist.

[i]. Robert Louis Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* (Yale University Press, 2012), 31.

[ii]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 83.

[iii]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 83.

[iv]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 83.

[v]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 85.

[vi]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 88.

[vii]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[viii]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 88.

[ix]. Gupta, *Tell Her Story*, 89.

[x]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[xi]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[xii]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[xiii]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[xiv]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[xv]. Wilken, *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity*, 31.

[xvi]. For a historically detailed account of this shift, see “The Making of Biblical Womanhood” by Beth Allison Barr.

[xvii]. Think for example of how Southern Baptists refuse women as elders but do not have bishops and employ a voting system, which is unmistakably based on Western democratic practice rather than biblical prescription.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Our short survey of a Biblical vision of Kingdom partnership between men and women with particular focus on women in ministry leadership is now complete. It is time to pull together a few threads.

From the creation account, we see that men and women are created with gendered differences to be paired counterparts in relationships marked by equality, mutuality, and complementarity. As image-bearers, men and women carry the dignity, authority, and purpose to reflect God's wise and loving order into the world, and creation's praise upward to God. The Fall corrupted this order, introducing both manipulation and domination and paving the way for gender-based hierarchy.

From the life of Jesus, we see God's work of salvation restoring dignity, authority, and purpose to women. From the womb that carried Him to the women who were healed by Him, from the women who were granted the revelation of His identity as Messiah to the women who were commissioned as witnesses to His resurrection, women are returned not only to

a place of value and belovedness but also to a status as partners in kingdom work.

From the accounts of first Christian communities, we see women as vital leaders of the early church, serving, teaching, representing, and supporting the work of the Kingdom of God. Women are valuable co-workers with their male counterparts, reflecting a recovery of creation's original design.

Finally, since leadership in the early church was about gifting, calling, and function regardless of gender or social status, if a person demonstrated the requisite gifts of the Spirit, a clear calling from God, and operated in the function of oversight, care, and teaching with wisdom, maturity, and a good reputation in the community of faith, they were recognized as leaders. Many communities had a team of leaders, often with roles that suited their gifts. These leadership collectives leveraged the complementarity and mutuality between men and women.

Above all, leadership was not expressed as dominance. All power in the early church had been reshaped by their foot-washing, cross-carrying, self-giving Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

We return to a question that was raised in the Preface. Why are interpretations of the text that are in favor of women in church leadership popping up now? Have we read the text wrongly all these years? The assumption here is that there is a historic position *against* women in leadership, and that a "liberal" or "progressive" cultural drift is taking place in the church today.

In her entry on “Women” in the IVP *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Lucy Peppiatt argues that “it would be wrong to assume a direct causal link between rereadings of Paul and feminism,” not least because “many feminists, both Christian and secular, would dismiss Paul and his writings altogether.”^[i] Instead, reasons for the rise of what she calls a “mutualist” reading of Paul’s letters in particular include “the rise in number of female scholars...and all scholars looking more closely at the place of women in the Bible.”^[ii] They are discovering “disregarded data, changing the way the role of women have had in the church, society, and mission is understood,” correcting places where the events have been “distorted in the past.”^[iii] She concludes her summary of current positions like this: “It is now recognized that the foundations for women to participate in all aspects of ministry in the church, to take up an equal role in marriage and the home, and to occupy positions of leadership come from within the Christian tradition.”^[iv] This is a massive statement in one of the most definitive and respected compendia of evangelical scholarship on Paul.

This is why the focus of this book has been deliberately on the New Testament era. My goal was to demonstrate that women were an active and integral part of ministry leadership from the beginning of the church. That status has been corrupted and, in some cases, lost. Though it was not the focus of this ebook, it is important to also note that not only were there women in church leadership in the early centuries of church history, but there have also been notable female leaders and teachers throughout church history, such as Gertrude the Great, Katharina Schutz Zell, Macrina, and so many others.

There are also other Christian traditions that have recognized women in leadership positions within the church in recent centuries, including Pentecostals in general, and the Assemblies of God in particular. I name this stream because I grew up in the Pentecostal tradition in Southeast Asia and regularly benefited from women leading and operating in their gifts before I came to America and thought to question it. Pentecostals and Charismatics ground their view of women in leadership in their theology of the Spirit, which recognizes that the anointing of the Spirit is poured out on men and women alike. [M]

As mentioned at the beginning, cultural corruption of a Biblical vision works both ways. If it is possible that a position in favor of women in leadership is simply the result of a progressive cultural view, it is also possible that a view in favor of exclusively male leadership is the result of a cultural view of patriarchy. Because Christianity is adept at contextualization, it is also open to contamination from its host culture. One of the most fruitful exercises a student of the Scriptures can explore is how Christians closest to the New Testament era understood a particular doctrine or practice. That is why this project presented not only a perspective on what a Biblical vision of women in church leadership is, but also provided examples of how that vision was expressed in the first few hundred years of church practice.

It is the conclusion of this project, therefore, that by the grace of God in Christ Jesus the Savior and Lord, men and women have been redeemed; their identity as God's image-bearers has been reclaimed; and their lives have been filled with the

presence and power of the Holy Spirit who calls, equips, and empowers male and female alike into service in the mission of God. Based on gifting, calling, and function, women can serve in any way within the church, including but not limited to as pastors, teachers, and elders. Because men and women are created as paired, different, and equal, men and women may express their gifts, calling, and function distinctly; yet they are to relate to each other with equality, complementarity, and mutuality.

[i] Peppiatt, "Women", p. 1127

[ii] Peppiatt, p. 1127

[iii] Peppiatt, p. 1127

[iv] Peppiatt, p. 1128

[v] See Gordon Fee's work on this subject long before the popular debates of our day.

APPENDIX A

WHAT ABOUT “HEADSHIP?”

There are two places in the New Testament where a man is referred to as the head of a woman, once in Ephesians 5 and once in 1 Corinthians 11. Ephesians 5 is about marriage and not directly relevant to our topic here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting, as Australian scholar Marg Mowczko does, that while many “Greek philosophers and writers, such as Plutarch taught that husbands are the leaders and rulers of their wives,” by contrast, “no Bible author, including Paul, tells husbands to be the leader, ruler, or authority of their wives.”^[i] Instead of “using any of the many Greek words which mean ruler, leader or authority, Paul used the word *kephalē* (“head”) with “body” to highlight the connectedness of husband and wife.”^[ii] Furthermore, nowhere—not even here in Ephesians 5—does Paul call husbands the head of the household. In fact, when he addresses husbands in this passage, *love* (used six times) not *leadership* is the dominant theme. The “head” metaphor is about *connection* to a wife, not *direction* of her.

In 1 Corinthians 11, the “head” is the subject of the first sixteen verses, most of which are related to head coverings. Many of these verses are confusing and even apparently contradictory. Lucy Peppiatt offers a persuasive strategy for reading this chapter in a way that retains the integrity of Paul’s thought and theology. She notes that throughout the letter, Paul seems to be responding to Corinthian slogans, sayings in their community that have maybe come from syncretism with Stoic philosophy (like the idea that men should have short hair) and angelology (bizarre views of angels in their midst). The quotes or slogans are easy to miss because there weren’t quotation marks or italics as in modern typesetting. Nevertheless, they are more noticeable earlier in the letter because they are one-liners. Peppiatt argues that 1 Corinthians 11:4-10 is an extended quote from their letter to him, a summary of their sayings and slogans about men and women in worship. His reply is a correction found in verse 11-12: “However, woman isn’t independent from man, and man isn’t independent from woman in the Lord. As woman came from man so also man comes from woman. But everything comes from God.”

Then, after asking them to judge for themselves, he uses sarcasm to restate their version of stoic views by making it sound ridiculous (vs. 14-15) since Paul, when he visited Corinth, likely had really long hair (He had taken a vow not to cut his hair for 18 months!). His conclusion in vs. 16 is that in none of his churches do they require this approach with women in worship.

This still leaves verse 3 as Paul's words: "Now I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." There is some debate about whether the translation should be "husband" or "man," since it's the same Greek word. To read "headship" as a statement that women are inferior and subordinate to men would also mean reading it as claiming that Christ is inferior and subordinate to God. Our discomfort with this reading arises not from current cultural opinions but rather from the fact that it radically contradicts Genesis 1-2, *and* that it purports a heretical view of the Trinity since *the Son is not subordinate to or inferior to the Father!* To say it plainly, there is no hierarchy in the Trinity.

If this refers to the husband as head of a wife, it might be merely a descriptive acknowledgment of the only acceptable (and widely popular) household structure in the Greco-Roman world. He was not necessarily sanctifying that structure; he was accepting it. However, as in Ephesians 5, Paul undermines the structure by neutralizing the power differential and redefining what headship should look like! If headship in Ephesians 5 is marked by love and sacrifice, headship in 1 Corinthians 11 is reframed in light of the unity and mutuality between the Father and the Son.

[i]. Marg Mowczko, “Kephālē and “Male Headship” in Paul’s Letters,” September 18, 2011. <https://margmowczko.com/kephale-and-male-headship-in-pauls-letters/>.

[ii]. Marg Mowczko, “Kephālē and “Male Headship” in Paul’s Letters,” [September 18, 2011.](#)

APPENDIX B

1 TIMOTHY 2

1 Timothy 2 contains instructions from Paul that seem to forbid women from teaching, preaching, or exercising authority. Yet it seems to contradict the roles that women occupied in both the Old and New Testament, and especially the functions they fulfilled in the early church. From Paul's own life and ministry, we see women doing all the things he seems to prohibit here. How do we reconcile this apparent incongruence? 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in the ESV reads:

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing —if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

There are several puzzles in this passage: that women should not teach; that they should not be in authority over a man; that

Eve was deceived; and that a woman would be saved in childbirth. These are puzzles not because they contradict contemporary sensibilities, but because they contradict Paul's own practice! As our survey of what women were doing in the churches Paul planted demonstrated, women were *not* silent.

So, what could Paul be talking about here?

A quick read of the entire letter shows that Paul is concerned with false teachers *and* false teaching. He warns against the content of the teaching; he guards against the kind of people who peddle such content; and he rebukes the reasons and motivations for false teachers (the love of money being one). This context is available to anyone without any extra digging into Greek or the backdrop of Ephesus. One might conclude that Paul's objection is not with the teacher's gender but rather with their credibility. If a teacher had been trained, it would be obvious in the content. If a teacher cared about the church, it would be evident in their approach.

But with a little bit of study into the language and the context of Ephesus, where Timothy lived, we see the picture with more detail.

First, let's do a bit language work. Using multiple translations can help. The CEB, for example, uses the word "wife" instead of "women," though the Greek could be translated either way. Next, let's look at the word for "authority." Verse 12 is sometimes translated as "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man." But this particular Greek word translated as "authority" in the NIV shows up only once

in the entire New Testament. Moreover, it's not the normal word for authority. When the New Testament speaks of authority, it uses the Greek word *exousia*. Here, the word *authentēin* is used instead. As Marg Mowczko outlines, “*Authentēs* typically meant ‘murderer’ in Classical Greek, and was often used in the context of a person slaying a member of their family.”^[i] Cynthia Westfall notes that “...the people who are targets of these actions are harmed, forced against their will (compelled), or at least their self-interest is being overridden because the actions involve an imposition of the subject’s will, ranging from dishonour to lethal force.”^[ii] It has the strong connotation of exploitation and domination. That is why the CEB translates it as “control her husband.”

Now, we turn to the backdrop of the city of Ephesus. The letter is addressed to Timothy, who serves as overseer of the church in Ephesus. When Paul planted churches in Greek cities, he went first to the Jewish communities that gathered in synagogues. Thus, churches in cities like Ephesus would have been made up of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. Jewish women would not have been allowed into the synagogue and, therefore, unable to learn. They would have now been permitted into Christian houses of worship (in homes) for the first time in mixed company with men. But they would not have had any context for God’s salvation story. In this passage, the force of emphasis is the imperative verb “learn:” Let women learn! There is a gift here, a newfound access to knowledge in truth, but it requires quietness and submission.

But then why does Paul refer to the fall in Genesis 3 and blame the woman for being deceived? Here is where context specific to Ephesus helps. As Acts recounts, Ephesus was home to the temple of Artemis the Great, a goddess served by priestesses. If Jewish women in Ephesus had been excluded from the synagogue and therefore at a disadvantage in the Biblical context for the gospel, Gentile women in Ephesus would have been drawn to the worship of Artemis and prone to import views from her cult into their newfound Christian faith.

We know quite a bit more about the cult of Artemis through a novel written around the time of Paul's ministry in Ephesus called *Ephesiaca* by Xenophon of Ephesus. Gary Hoag conducted an in-depth study of the novel and compared it with 1 Timothy 2. [iii] Here is a striking discovery: “‘nearly every word in 1 Tim. 2:9-10 appears in *Ephesiaca*.’” [iv] Even Paul's puzzling prohibition of “elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes” (1 Tim. 2:9, CEB) is likely a reference to how followers of Artemis were charged to imitate the goddess in hairstyle and clothing. The phrase for “costly clothing” is the phrase used to describe the “clothing that the wealthy priestesses wore in cultic activities.” [v] Paul is telling the Christian women in Ephesus not to “dress as they would have done to serve Artemis.” [vi]

Moreover, the cult of Artemis taught that a woman was “the author of man”, with versions of a creation account that showed a man as the one who was deceived. By retelling the Genesis story to emphasize that it was a woman who was deceived first, Paul is not denigrating women; he is leveling the ground, showing that both men and women have fallen short.

If Artemis worshippers had elevated women and denigrated men, Paul pushes hard in the other direction not to flip the power dynamics but to cancel it out.

One final question remains about the strange comment on being saved through childbirth. Are women redeemed by becoming mothers? Here, Sandra Glahn's extensive research on Artemis is helpful. She writes that "Artemis...came to be associated with virginity and, especially in Ephesus, with midwifery."^[vii] It was she who determined who lived or died in childbirth. Since medical care was relatively primitive, fatality rates would have been higher for mother and baby; one can understand the appeal of such a promise of safety from Artemis. She came to be associated with the titles of deliverer and savior. In the CEB, Paul's assurance for Christians is clear: "A wife will be brought safely through childbirth." What Paul is doing is redirecting the hope of salvation and the role of deliverer to Christ alone and our access to this salvation—in this life and beyond—is, as Paul wrote in his own letter to the Ephesians—available by grace through faith (1 Timothy 2:9b; Ephesians 2:10, CEB).

In summary, 1 Timothy 2 is an admonishment for women who had previously had no knowledge of Scripture to learn with humility in their new community of faith; it is an exhortation against religious syncretism, the temptation to mix elements of Artemis worship with faith in Christ; it was a prohibition on the use of power in a coercive or dominant way because it is inconsistent with the way of Jesus; and it is a promise of care and deliverance in this life and in the age to come through faith in Christ alone.

- [i]. Marg Mowczko, "The Meaning of Authentein With a Brief History of Authent- Words," February 10, 2024, https://margmowczko.com/authentein-1-timorty2_12/.
- [ii]. Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ* (Baker Academic, 2016), 292.
- [iii]. Gary G. Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy: Fresh Insights from Ephesiaca by Xenophon of Ephesus* (Eisenbrauns, 2015).
- [iv]. Gary Hoag, quoted in Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision of Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts* (InterVarsity Press, 2019), 148.
- [v]. Lucy Peppiatt, *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision*, 149.
- [vi]. Peppiatt quoting Hoag in *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision*, p. 149; Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus*, p. 79.
- [vii]. Sandra L. Glahn, "The Identity of Artemis in First-Century Ephesus," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 no. 687 (July-September 2015): 319.

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