

# Exploring God's Design for Gender Roles in Church Leadership

Frequently Asked Questions & Grace Gathering's Responses



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The **Frequently Asked Questions** presented in this document augment the material presented in the article "Exploring God's Design For Gender Roles in Church Ministry: An In-Depth Look into a Biblical Perspective". For a more complete explanation of the doctrine and biblical basis for the answers given in these FAQ's, the reader is directed this article.

Most of the material in this FAQ document was written by Christ Community Evangelical Free Church of the Kansas City Missouri and was included as part of the Christ Community version of the doctrinal article by the same name. The FAQ material has been removed to form a separate document but is used with the permission of Christ Community Church.



## How can you prevent women from serving as elders, but not as pastors? Aren't the Biblical offices of elder and pastor the same office?

A survey of some key Biblical texts (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1-2) does seem to indicate that the New Testament writers used these words interchangeably to refer to the same office (along with the term "Overseer").<sup>1</sup> However, the question we must ask is not so much about how Paul used these terms, but rather about how we use these terms today and the level of similarity between the modern and ancient pastoral roles.

What Paul is restricting to males is not a title or position, but a role of exercising ultimate doctrinal and governmental oversight. In the context of the first-century church, the group of people who performed these duties were referred to as Elders/Overseers/Pastors. However, in our contemporary church context, the term "pastor" does not necessarily describe the same function. While it certainly conveys an appropriate degree of spiritual authority, it is not necessarily equated with the highest level of governmental or doctrinal oversight. Pastor is a gift and not simply a position.

What the Bible is concerned about is not the title given to a particular office, but the functions performed by those offices. In other words, we could call our facilities staff "elders" or "pastors," but that does not endue them with the ultimate spiritual authority of the church. Likewise, changing the title of the Elders (to, perhaps, the Church Council) would not remove their spiritual authority. Therefore, the terminology used in each individual church must be evaluated based on function. At Grace Gathering, we invest our Elders with the ultimate doctrinal and governmental oversight, and therefore we reserve these positions for men. However, women are permitted to serve in the role of pastor at Grace Gathering.

## How does this issue fit into the categories of creation/fall/redemption/new creation?

Due to the differences between the Complementarian and Egalitarian positions, each will have a different answer to this question. Here's how the **Egalitarian** position fits into the four chapters:

- Creation: Egalitarians argue that men and women were created in the Garden as equal in both being *and* function, and thus there were no role distinctions. Both men and women were given the cultural mandate in Genesis 1:28-30, with no mention of specific roles based on their gender.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not an insignificant point that three different authors use these words interchangeably (Luke, Paul, and Peter). Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 32.



- Fall: However, when sin entered the world, this proper relationship of perfect equality was disrupted, and an illegitimate hierarchy was introduced as a curse on sin (Gen 3:16). As a result of their sin, man would now dominate woman and illegitimately rule over her.
- Redemption: Christ came to reverse the destructive effects of the fall, including this illegitimate hierarchy – in Christ, full male/female equality is restored (Gal 3:28), hierarchy is abolished, and servant attitudes are called for in men and women alike (Eph 5:21).
- New Creation: While these effects begin to take place in this life, they will not ultimately be fulfilled until Christ's Kingdom fully arrives. In this new state, all men and women will be as they were originally created – perfectly equal in form and function.

The **Complementarian** position is outlined as follows:

- Creation: Complementarians are quick to point out that man was created first and thus has a certain chronological primacy even before the fall (a point that Paul himself refers to in 1 Cor 11:8 and 1 Tim 2:13 in applying role-restrictions to women). They also stress that God created Eve to fill a specific role – namely, to be a “suitable helper” ( *tzela*, *ezer*) for Adam (Gen 2:18 & 20).<sup>2</sup> But perhaps most significantly, we find Adam bearing certain responsibilities both before and after the fall that seem to indicate a higher responsibility, such as naming the woman (both naming her “kind” in Gen 2:23 – as he did with the other created things, 2:19-20 – and giving her a proper name in 3:20). We also find God seeking out Adam after the sin in the garden, despite the fact that Eve also participated in the sin.
- Fall: Complementarians agree that something changed after the fall (Gen 3) – the distortion of a proper hierarchy. Instead of the woman functioning in her appointed role as a “suitable helper,” her desire (*teshuka* – a longing, desire) is to rule over her husband, who responds in a domineering fashion (*mashal* – to rule over) instead of fulfilling his role as a loving servant-leader. Thus, both sides are distorted.<sup>3</sup>
- Redemption: What is restored in Christ is not functional equality or the removal of hierarchy, but rather that the original role distinctions will be practiced as they were intended to be in God's creation design – in mutual love and respect for the ontological value of each individual.

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<sup>2</sup> However, Egalitarians quickly point out that this same Hebrew word is most often used to describe God's relationship with man (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:29). This further affirms that functional differentiation does not affect ontological value, for surely God is not inferior to man!

<sup>3</sup> Just a few verses later in Gen 4:7, “desire” (*teshuka*) and “domination” (*mashal*) are again used in conjunction. The close proximity of these verses suggests they should be interpreted similarly. Just as sin longs to assert its power over Cain, so the woman seeks to assert herself over her husband. In response to sin, Cain is instructed to master or dominate over sin. In the same way, God is predicting that man will dominate in his relationship to women.



- New Creation: When Christ's kingdom fully arrives, men and women will still function with certain hierarchical relationships as they were always intended to.

At this point, it is important to note that both positions are at least partially right. Egalitarians are right that both genders participate in the cultural mandate of Gen 1:28-30. They are also right that there is no specific mention of differing gender roles within the cultural mandate. However, Complementarians are correct in looking at the Creation account in Genesis 2, where the woman was created to fill a specific role, namely to be a "suitable helper" for the man. We also see the man asserting certain leadership roles, such as the naming of Eve and the confrontation with God immediately after the fall (but prior to the curse). Thus, it seems that role distinctions *were* a part of God's design in the original creation, and the fall corrupted these appropriate gender roles. Thus, Christ does not abolish this hierarchy, he redeems it and restores it to the way it was intended to function.

### What does it mean to "submit"? (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11)

The Biblical notion of submission (*hypotassō*) is truly a rich concept – one that effects every Christian regardless of gender or position! First and foremost, Scripture talks about the need for every Christian to submit to God (Heb 12:9; Jam 4:7), his law (Rom 8:7), and the effect of the gospel to produce righteousness (Rom 10:3; 2 Cor 9:13). All Christians are also instructed to submit to all authorities, both governmental (Rom 13:1, 5; Titus 3:1; 1Pet 2:13) and spiritual (1 Cor 16:16). And ultimately, everything (people, institutions, creation, angels, etc.) is in submission under the authority of Christ (Luke 10:17, 10; 1 Cor 15:27-28; Eph 1:22; 5:25; Phil 3:21; Heb 2:8; 1Pet 3:22).

However, the Bible does give instructions about submission that are specific to particular groups of people: wives are to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:24; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1Pet 3:1, 5), children to their parents (Lk 2:51; 1 Tim 3:4; Heb 12:9), slaves to their masters (Titus 2:9; 1Pet 2:18), young men to older men (1Pet 5:5); and spirits of prophets to the control of the prophets (1 Cor 14:32).<sup>4</sup>

From the references above, we are able to develop a working definition of submission. Biblical submission is simply acknowledging that God has designed the world with a certain order which we must acknowledge and honor. Submission does not require one to forfeit his/her will, nor does it suggest a hierarchy of value. Rather, submission is about honoring the order of the world as God designed it and embracing our God-given functions in it.

As specifically applied to 1 Cor 14:32 and 1 Tim 2:12, God has designed that, under Christ, males

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<sup>4</sup> Apart from the verses listed here, *hypotassō* is used only 4 other times, two of which are negative examples (Gal 2:5; Heb 2:5). The other two are more controversial: one verse calls every believer to submit themselves to every other believer (Eph 5:21) and the other specifically discusses the results of the Fall (Rom 8:20). The former passage will be discussed in the next response, and the latter depends on how we understand the fall to influence gender roles, which we discussed above (#2).



are to exercise ultimate doctrinal and governmental authority in the church. This does not imply that women have no say in the direction of the church or its doctrinal purity. Nor does it mean that women have less value and are therefore refused participation in the highest level of leadership. Rather, women are to be encouraged to participate in the life of the local church by exercising their gifts. They are free and encouraged to voice their opinion (see our interpretation of “silent” below), but ultimately, they are to honor the order God has established in the church (1 Cor 11:2-16).

## Doesn't Eph 5:21 teach that both men and women are to practice mutual submission?

In order to answer this question, we must first address what we mean by “mutual submission.” Some use this phrase to suggest that any hierarchy or order is virtually abolished – both husbands and wives are to submit to each other in the same way with no distinction. Others use this phrase to suggest that husbands and wives are to maintain their specific roles, but are to exercise mutual yielding for the benefit of the other. Still others suggest that what is called for in Scripture is not equal submission of one to another, but rather submission of everyone to those who are in authority over them (and everyone has some authority over them).

The word “submit” (hypotassō) in verse 21 is a preposition that modifies the command to “be filled with the Spirit” (v. 18). Thus, the evidence of being filled by the Spirit are described by the list of prepositions that follows it: speaking encouraging words to each other (v. 19); singing to the Lord (v. 19), giving thanks to God (v. 20) and “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (v. 21). Paul then goes on, presumably to unpack precisely what this submission to one another looks like. Surely Paul would not abolish any hierarchy in verse 21, only to follow it up with instructions for wives to submit to their husbands (5:22-24), children to submit to their parents (6:1-3), and servants to submit to their masters (6:5-8)!

In addition, apart from this verse in question, we have no other example in Scripture of these hierarchies being overturned: masters are never called to submit to their servants, nor fathers to their children, nor government officials to their citizens, nor husbands to their wives.<sup>5</sup> They are called to love those under their authority and to seek their welfare (even at personal cost to themselves), but they are never called to submit to them. From this, we can conclude that the concept of mutual submission cannot mean that everyone is to submit to each other in the same way. Otherwise, Paul contradicts himself entirely!

It is possible that Paul simply means that each person is to lovingly yield (“submit”) to all others

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<sup>5</sup> If Paul was actually abolishing any notion of hierarchy, it seems odd that he would use Christ's relationship to the church as a model for the husband's relationship to the wife. It seems that this position would even have to suggest, at this point, that Christ actually gives up authority over the church!



while maintaining their respective roles. However, this would certainly be an unnatural usage of *hypotassō*, which always implies yielding to those in positions of authority.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, it seems best to understand the text to mean that, as an evidence of the Spirit in our lives, Christians will willingly submit themselves to their respective authorities as established by God: wives to husbands, the Church to Christ, children to fathers, servants to masters. Yet, it must be noted, Paul also exhorts husbands and fathers and masters to act with love and compassion toward those who are under their authority, in the same way that Christ acted on behalf of his Church. In this understanding, Ephesians 5:21 does not abolish any hierarchy, but affirms it and corrects its faults and abuses. Everyone is to submit to whatever authority is over them (and everyone has some authority over them). But likewise, those in positions of authority are to do so in a way that promotes the wellbeing of those under their oversight.

## Doesn't the Bible command women to be "silent" in the church (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:11-12)?

In answering this question, two important reminders are in order. First, the New Testament was not written in English, but Greek. Thus, the question is not about the English word "silent," but rather about the Greek words behind this English translation. Furthermore, we must not make the mistake of assuming that every occurrence of the English word "silent" implies that the same Greek word lies behind it. In fact, in both passages cited in the question above, a different Greek word is used (*sigāō* in 1 Cor 14:34; *hēsuchia* in 1 Tim 2:2, 11-12).

Second, we must remember that words do not determine meaning, context does. Therefore, the question is not even about the meaning of *sigāō* and *hēsuchia* but rather about what those words mean in their respective contexts. As we noted above, 1 Cor 14:34 cannot be understood as a prohibition against women speaking in the church, since just 3 chapters earlier Paul encouraged women to pray and prophesy, provided they do so in a proper manner (1 Cor 11:5). Rather, Paul is instructing women to be silent (that is, to "hold their tongues") in a specific context, namely when determining whether a prophetic utterance is doctrinally sound. Thus, in the context of determining doctrine, women are not to participate to the same degree as males. In such a context, they are to remain silent (*sigāō*).

However, 1 Tim 2:11-12 provides a different context and employs a different Greek word. In this context, Paul encourages women to refrain from teaching and governing at the highest level of the church, but rather to remain "silent" (*hēsuchia*). It is instructive to look back at 1 Tim 2:2, where Paul instructs his readers (of both genders) to pray for the authorities over them, "[so] that we may live peaceful and quiet (*hēsuchia*) lives in all godliness and holiness." Certainly, Paul is not telling them to live silently, but rather to pursue peace and tranquility. In the same way, Paul

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<sup>6</sup> BDAG, "hypotassō", 1042.



calls females to respect the authorities over them by pursuing this same peace and tranquility (“quietness”). Interestingly, Paul gives the same command to pursue peaceful living to the men (1 Tim 2:8), though he does not use the same word. Therefore, better than “silent” in this context is the understanding that women are to respect the authority that God has designated to males by living quiet, non-contentious lives. To forbid women from speaking in the church is an abuse of Scripture and violates the clear teaching of 1 Cor 11:5.

## What does it mean for the male to be the “head” of the woman? (1 Cor 11:3) [6; 11]

Much of the debate on this issue has centered around the meaning of this word “head” (*kefalē*, *kephalē*). While countless nuanced definitions have been proposed, two main definitions stand as the most plausible. The traditional understanding of *kephalē* is that it refers to an authoritative position over another (or a position of responsibility over another, as in Eph 1:22; 5:22-24; Col 2:10; cf. Col 2:15). More recently, others have suggested that a better interpretation of *kephalē* is that it refers not to one’s authoritative “head,” but rather one’s origin or source (like the “head” of a river; see Col 1:18; 2:19; Eph 4:15).<sup>7</sup>

While it is true that both of these translations are possible, they are not equally probable. We must remember that meaning is not determined merely by words, but by the context in which these words are found. In this case, even if we grant for the sake of the argument that “source” is a better translation, the context still conveys the notion of authority – a point made by even the earliest proponents of the Source Theory.

Yet even beyond this, to claim “source” as a better translation has dangerous implications for our theology. Whatever meaning we apply to the male-female relationship described in 1 Cor 11:3, we must apply this same meaning to the Christ-man relationship and the God-Christ relationship also described in this verse. Yet, to claim that God is the source of Christ sounds quite similar to the Arian heresy of the early church, which claimed that Christ was physically created by God. This heresy was condemned at the council of Nicea in 325 B.C., and rightfully so! After all, if Christ had any source whatsoever (even God the Father himself), how could he be the eternal God of Scripture (Jn 1:1, 8:58; Mic 5:2)?

Rather, if we maintain the traditional translation of “authority,” what is being suggested is a hierarchical relationship. Some have suggested that this promotes an inappropriate hierarchy

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<sup>7</sup> A third option has been suggested recently, which seeks to shed the notion of hierarchy. This new understanding translates *kephalē*, with the idea of “priority” or “preeminence.” Thus, as the head is the preeminent part of the body, so the man is in the preeminent position. However, it seems that even this meaning does not overturn the hierarchical implications it seeks to evade. Rather, it corrects the abuse of such hierarchical relationships. Therefore, it seems best to retain the more traditional interpretation of “authority,” while stressing that such authority and hierarchy does not imply an inferior status for women, but merely a higher responsibility placed on the male. See question 12 below for more on the meaning of authority.





between God the Father and Christ the Son. But the submission of the Son to the authority of the Father is a point of repeated emphasis in Scripture (Luke 22:42; John 6:38, 57; 8:28; 1 Cor 3:21-23; 1 Cor 15:27-28). For these reasons, it seems clear that Paul's metaphorical use of "head" could not be merely referring to man as the *source* of woman, but rather to man as one who bears a position of *authoritative responsibility*. We do not mean to imply that men exercise some form of rulership over women, but rather that God has established a form of responsibility and accountability that husbands are most accountable before God for the spiritual health and direction of their marriages.

### Isn't Paul's restriction on women attributed to his patriarchal context? Since our culture has changed, shouldn't our application of this text also change?

In answering these questions, a crucial distinction must be made between that which is culturally relevant and that which is culturally based. Indeed, all Scripture is culturally relevant in that it was written to specific people during a specific time addressing specific circumstances. Thus, a proper understanding of a biblical text must begin with the cultural context in which it was written, determine the universal truth being declared, and seek modern parallels to which it applies. That being said, this in no way implies that a change in culture demands a change in the truth being taught. What changes is the way in which that truth is practiced.

As we saw in our study of the main texts on this issue, all three of them base their claim not merely on cultural principle or practice, though this is certainly part of Paul's concern.<sup>8</sup> Rather, he bases each text on the trans-cultural creation design of God (1 Tim 2:13-15; 1 Cor 11:8-12; 14:34).<sup>9</sup> Thus the universal truth to be learned is that men and women were created to fill certain roles, both in the nuclear family (the home) and in the spiritual family (the Church). This truth transcends any specific culture, as Paul himself indicates when he reminds the Corinthians that all the churches, regardless of geographic or cultural differences, have the same practice (1 Cor 11:16; 14:33b).

Not only does Paul appeal to God's creation design, and the practice of all the other churches in the first century, but also to the exemplary relationship between Christ and man (1 Cor 11:3), Christ and his Church (Eph 5:25-33), and the relationship between members of the Trinity itself (1 Cor 11:3). If we determine that the authoritative structure Paul describes for the church is only a cultural reality and ought to be altered, aren't we also by the same logic obligated to change our

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<sup>8</sup> Paul does make explicit reference to the cultural notion of shame, especially in 1 Cor 11:2-16. Clearly, these cultural norms shift over time.

<sup>9</sup> There is some debate as to what "Law" Paul is referring to in 1 Cor. 14:34. Given the strong witness of the previous two passages mentioned above, both of which refer to God's creation design in Genesis 2, Paul is probably again referring back to Gen. 2, part of the Jewish Law (Torah). Cf. D.A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches'" [RBMW], 148-153.



understanding of Christ's authority over his Church or over human beings in general? And, more costly, wouldn't this also alter the relationships within the Trinity?

So, in answer to the questions above, no, Paul's restriction on women is not attributed to his patriarchal context, but rather to God's creation design. Inherent in the way God designed and created the world are certain authority structures, reflective of the very image of God and the relationship among the members of the Trinity. These authority structures not only reflect God's design, but also Christ's relationship to the Church. However, to the second question, yes our application can and should change so long as it does not contradict the universal truth being taught, namely that males and females were created to fill certain complementary roles (which, according to 1 Tim 2:12, reserves doctrinal oversight and governance for males).

### Based on 1 Cor 11:2-16, should women be required to wear head coverings?

This question is related to the one above in that they both confuse the distinction between being culturally relevant (which all scripture is) and being culturally based. All literature is culturally relevant, and the Bible is no exception. Again, our goal is to determine the universal truth in the text and filter out the way it is culturally expressed. In 1 Cor 11:2-16, the universal principle is not that women should wear head coverings, but rather that women should act in a way that honors the authoritative "head" that is appointed over them. The head coverings, then, are merely outward signs of the inward attitude of submission.

We don't know much about the nature of these head coverings, but what is clear from the context is that they were easily identified as a feminine accessory, much like (in the first century) long hair was an obviously female attribute that conveyed honor and respectability. To shed one's head covering, or to have masculine looking features such as short hair was a cultural offense and brought disgrace on the church and family. Yet in our modern context, neither of these outward signs convey the same message they once did – in fact, short hair on women is not unusual or shameful whatsoever! However, this does not suggest that the concept of submission in the church is overturned, but rather that the expression of such submission will change. The outward sign may change, provided that the inward attitude of submission to the creation design of God (the universal truth of the passage) is not overlooked.

Some have charged Complementarians with "selective literalism," suggesting that we are simply retaining what is convenient for us (hierarchy in the church) and omitting that which is inconvenient (wearing head coverings). It is suggested that, if we retain one, we should also retain the other. Likewise, if we are willing to dismiss the need for a head covering, we should also dismiss the hierarchy which it is an expression of. However, we must understand Paul's logic in his argument. Paul cites the creation order, not to defend head coverings per se, but to defend the reason head coverings are necessary – because it conveys an appropriate expression of



femininity which honors the way God created her. To deviate from these culturally specific norms is to disrupt God's created order. Thus, what does not change in this text is the notion of God's creation order and its implications for submission. What does change is the cultural expression of how we demonstrate our submission to this creation order, with women and men both acting appropriately.

## When Paul cites the creation order as the reason for his prohibition, is he suggesting that women cannot teach because they are more gullible or less educated than men?

This is not at all what Paul is saying! This question particularly addresses 1 Tim 2:14, which notes that "it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (NASB). This, Paul states, is a reason to restrict women from exercising ultimate doctrinal or governmental authority in the church. But Paul makes no reference to Eve's gullibility, but simply states that she was the one who was deceived.

In order to fully understand what Paul is saying, we must understand 1 Tim 2:14 in conjunction with 2:13 (they are, after all, joined by a conjunction). Verse 13 tells us that man was created first, and woman was created afterward to be a helper suitable for him. However, when Satan targeted Eve, he was intentionally disrupting this God-ordained order. Adam, the protector of the garden, had failed to protect his most prized possession. And when she participated in disobedience, Adam followed along with no protest whatsoever. If anyone is more pathetic and gullible, it is the man who shirks his responsibility and allows them both to be deceived!

The point Paul is making is that man has been given a position of authority that cannot be shifted between genders. God made the woman to be man's suitable helper, and when these roles are compromised, disaster happens. Paul is in no way degrading either gender but is simply citing the fall as what happens when we go against God's design. In the same way, when God's design is not followed in the order of the local church, we open ourselves to the same fate.

## What are we to make of Jesus' & Paul's treatment of women?

There is no question that Jesus treated women with great dignity and respect. One of the overwhelming themes of the gospel accounts is the tremendous value Jesus bestows on women. He included them in his band of followers, he encouraged them to take a position of learning among the men, he healed them and showed them extraordinary compassion, and perhaps most significantly, he bestowed on them the great honor of being the first witnesses of his resurrection. Indeed, in a culture where women were undervalued, abused, forgotten, objectified, and marginalized, Jesus gave them great honor as key contributors to his Kingdom.



Likewise, Paul bestows great value on women and their roles in local church ministry. Paul identified Euodia and Syntyche as “fellow workers” who “contend by [his] side” (Phil 4:2-3). Phoebe served as a deacon (*diakonos*) of the church of Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1-2). Priscilla, a fellow tent-making teacher (just like Paul himself) played a key role in the instruction of Apollos and the early years of the Church at Ephesus (Acts. 18; Rom. 16:3-5a). Paul praised Junia as “outstanding among the apostles” (Rom. 16:7).<sup>10</sup>

Whatever else can be said on this subject, it cannot be denied that both Jesus and Paul radically redefined the position and value of women within the Kingdom of God. However, we should not assume that this indicates that either Jesus or Paul would promote female participation in the highest level of doctrinal oversight or church governance. Nothing either of them said or did contradicted this belief, and in fact Paul was most outspoken against women in this highest level of leadership.

However, to avoid overcorrection, it must be acknowledged and appreciated how much value both Paul and Jesus placed on women and on their roles (often prominent roles at that) within the Kingdom of God. At Grace Gathering, we intend to walk this line with thoughtful intention, honoring Paul’s restriction while encouraging female participation at every other level of church functionality.

## Doesn’t Gal 3:28 abolish any distinction between male and female roles?

This verse has often become the proof text of the egalitarian position (much like 1 Tim 2:12 is the token proof text for Complementarians). The verse states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” But it is quite clear that the context of this verse is not about specific roles in the church, but rather about equal standing in the Kingdom of God. All are “children of God” (Gal 3:26), all are “baptized into Christ (3:27), all are “clothed...with Christ” (3:27), all are Abraham’s seed (3:29) and heirs of the promises made to Abraham (3:29). Regardless of ethnic, socio-economic, or gender factors, all are on equal footing in the Kingdom of God.

But, it is objected, shouldn’t this salvific equality extend to “other aspects of life in the believing community as well?”<sup>11</sup> Indeed it should! The covenant community of God’s people is to be vastly different than the surrounding culture. In a world where dividing lines fall along ethnic differences, the church is to embrace all races with equal respect and love. In an economic

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<sup>10</sup> While there is some debate as to whether this name should be feminine (Junia) or masculine (Junias), we are compelled by the fact that there is no known occurrence of the masculine form of this name during the first century. In contrast, we know this to be a feminine name used during this time period. Cf. Linda L. Belleville, “Women Leaders in the Bible,” [DBE], 117.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “Male and Female in the New Creation” [DBE], 172.



system where value is determined by your position in society or the size of your house, the community of God's people is to treat the outcasts as equals. And in a society where women were devalued, abused, overlooked and objectified, the Christian ekklesia is to be a place where all people are valued, protected, appreciated and respected.

Yet, this in no way implies that such considerations should be discarded when it comes to church leadership. Nor does it overrule the occasions where Paul has prohibited such practices, suggesting it is his policy in every church (1 Cor 11:16; 14:33b). Therefore, while we agree that this verse has profound implications for the practice of the Christian ekklesia, it does not abolish any gender distinction in church roles.

### What is the meaning of “authority” (1 Cor 11:10, 1 Tim 2:12)?

If, as we have argued, men have been given the responsibility to exercise authority in the church, then we must understand what this authority constitutes, and what its limits are. “This question is crucial because the New Testament shows that the basic relationships of life fit together in terms of authority and compliance.”<sup>12</sup> Relationships between parents and children (Eph 6:1-2), governors and subjects (Rom 13:1-7), employers and employees (1Pet 3:18-20), church leaders and lay people (Heb 13:7, 17), and husbands and wives (Eph 5:22-33) all function based on an interplay of “authority and compliance.” However, any attempt to define authority must recognize that each relationship will tap into a different nuance of authority. A husband-wife relationship will look much different than a parent-child relationship, which will also differ from an employer-employee relationship, etc. Therefore, it is not enough to ask what “authority” means, but we must also ask how authority functions within *particular relationships*.

John Piper and Wayne Grudem offer some helpful words to this point:

We would define authority in general as the *right* (Matthew 8:9) and *power* (Mark 1:27; 1 Corinthians 7:37) and *responsibility* (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10) *to give direction to another*. This applies perfectly to God in all His relationships. But it applies in very different ways to the different human relationships. ...For Christians, right and power recede and responsibility predominates. ...Authority becomes a burden to bear, not a right to assert. It is a sacred duty to discharge for the good of others.<sup>13</sup>

Piper and Grudem are right that, for the Christian, authority is not a prestigious position to be lorded over others, nor is it a power play to capitalize on selfish desires. Rather, Christian authority is a *responsibility* that one party bears over another. This is why Christian leaders are held responsible for the spiritual status of their congregants (Heb 13:17), why husbands are responsible

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<sup>12</sup> Piper and Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns” [*RBMW*], 78.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



to care for their wives through self-sacrifice (Eph 5:25-33), why employers are responsible to treat their employees well (Eph 6:9), and presumably why God sought Adam immediately after the fall (Gen 3:9-13) – he was ultimately responsible for what had transpired. Thus bearing authority is no longer a matter of personal exaltation, but of the responsibility to exercise care for another. Instead of asserting one's right over another, Christian authority actually elevates the rights of the one who is disadvantaged.

However, we ought not to confuse this shift from power to responsibility to mean that God abolishes any authoritative hierarchy. After all, if we abandon the male-female hierarchy in the church or the home, why not also abandon the same hierarchy in business and child-rearing (cf. Eph 5:22-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1Pet 2:13-3:7)? Rather, Jesus redefines the kind of authority to be exercised by his followers (Mt 20:25-26). Therefore, we affirm that such authority and hierarchy is part of God's creation design and thus is still operative today, but it makes a fundamental shift from the exercise of power to the responsibility to care for and promote the wellbeing of others.

## So what areas of ministry are open to the involvement of women?

Based on the understanding of Scripture outlined above (the equal gifting of both genders, the female participation in prophetic ministries in the early church [1 Cor 11:5; Acts 2:14-21], the example of women in teaching and leadership positions, etc.) the *only* restriction placed on women is that they are not to participate in the highest level of doctrinal or governmental oversight. Therefore, women are encouraged to participate in every other area of ministry in the local church, including teaching ministries (expositing scripture, preaching, doctrinal instruction, etc.) and ministries of oversight (participating on a leadership team, chairing a committee, etc.). At Grace Gathering, the *only* area of ministry reserved for men are the Elders who bear the responsibility of doctrinal and governmental oversight. All other positions (including other pastoral positions) and ministries are open for female participation and leadership.

## Since both Eve (Gen 2:18, 20b) and God (Ex 18:4; Dt. 33:29; Ps 30:10; 33:20; Isa 41:10) are referred to as a helper (*ezer*), doesn't this abolish any notion of a submissive role for the woman?

While the propositions behind this question are true – both God and Eve are described as man's helper – the conclusion is a bit skewed. This question assumes that, since both God and Eve are described as a helper, that their helping roles must be parallel. However, we must be reminded that context determines meaning, not words alone. When God is described as man's helper, it is as a greater being (greater in both ontology and function) lending aide to a lesser, inferior being. However, in the context of Eden, Adam and Eve were not ontologically mismatched – they were



equal! The difference is functional, not ontological. Therefore, we must be careful as to how much of a parallel we draw between God's helping role and Eve's helping role.

However, this parallel does teach us some significant truths that cannot be overlooked. Most significantly, it demonstrates that a helping role does not indicate inferiority. Unfortunately, this designation has been misunderstood and abused, resulting in chauvinistic attitudes that subject women to the status of servants (could this be part of what God referred to in Gen 3:16?). Yet, God did not become inferior when he stepped into his role as a helper. In fact, when God helps, he does something for us which we could not do for ourselves. In the same way, women are not inferior helpers, but are made to do what men could not on their own. If anything, this should elevate their status, not detract from it!

## What is the difference between preaching and biblical authority?

It is clear that activity of preaching the gospel is central to biblical truth. The word "preach" is used 97 times in the New Testament. Paul twice instructs Timothy to preach the word (1 Tim 4:13, 2 Tim 2:2) and he also commends those who do the work preaching the word as being worthy of double honor (1 Tim 5:17). Preaching also remains a central part of the worship service experience at Grace Gathering. What is not clear, however, is whether or not the pastoral preaching we experience in our modern church context is the same as the preaching of the first century church. We recognize that pastoral preaching is a form and can change with culture and time.

As mentioned in the article "Exploring God's Design for Gender Roles in Church Leadership: An In-Depth Look into a Biblical Perspective", there is a parallel between modern pastoral preaching and prophecy that Paul discusses in 1 Cor 14. This preaching brings encouragement, comfort and instruction to the body and can best be defined as theology applied. Pastoral preaching encompasses both prophecy and teaching. In most cases, pastoral preaching includes the teaching that depends on the authority and doctrine already established by the elders (teaching that helps people understand and put into practice the word of God). This type of pastoral preaching is open to a variety of gifted individuals including women and guests (since the authority already lies with the elders).

It is important to note, however, that much of the teaching in the NT era was actually establishing doctrine since the canon of Scripture was not yet complete. In the same way, today, the activity of establishing sound doctrine differs from pastoral preaching. This activity involves weighing carefully what is said and establishing what is doctrinally accurate. This involves a degree of authority. It may well be that this is the authority that Jesus invested in Peter when he said, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:17-28).





Most of the preaching that occurs in the worship services at Grace Gathering is pastoral preaching which is similar to the prophecy discussed by Paul in 1 Cor 14. However, there are times when the Elders utilize worship service preaching as a mechanism or a voice in establishing what is sound doctrine. In those cases, the work of preaching is reserved for the role of Elder. At Grace Gathering we identify the sermons that establish sound doctrine as being “Formational” so that the congregation is able to distinguish between what is pastoral preaching and what is establishing of doctrine.

Preaching that establishes doctrine is usually an effort that defines that doctrine for the local church for the first time. Some examples of preaching and teaching at Grace Gathering that would be considered establishing doctrine include defining a doctrinal position on the nature of hell, the position on homosexual behavior, a doctrinal position on whether sign and supernatural gifts are for today or relegated to the apostolic period.

The more common pastoral preaching at Grace Gathering does not establish authority, but instead depends on the authority and doctrine established by the Elders. Although pastoral sermons contain doctrinal content, they are not establishing that doctrine for the first time. The Elders exercise authority over the doctrinal content of pastoral preaching by approving those who do the preaching and reviewing the message topics and content. The bulk of this activity is done by the Senior Leader at Grace Gathering who is an Elder. This process of doctrinal oversight regarding preaching is communicated routinely to the congregation so that those who regularly attend Grace Gathering can distinguish and recognize the doctrinal authority in pastoral preaching.

## Could the Senior Pastor of Grace Gathering be a woman?

Within the organizational structure of Grace Gathering the senior pastor or senior leader is always a member of the elder team and functions with this level of shared authority. Because of this, the senior leader at Grace will be a qualified male. Women can serve as pastors and ministry heads within any ministry at Grace but the position of senior leader who is also an Elder must be a qualified male.

## What do I do if I don't agree with the position Grace Gathering takes on this issue?

Foundational doctrines within the church are positions that should require unity and agreement within the body. Things like the nature of God (his eternality, triunity, omni-presence, etc.), the nature of salvation (Jesus as the only way to the Father, death, burial, resurrection, salvation by faith, etc.), godly morality (sexual purity, honesty, racial equality, dignity of all life, etc. as moral absolutes), and the authority of God's word (original manuscripts without error, historical and grammatical approach to interpretation, etc.) are all among the areas that believers should





defend against those who oppose.

However, there are a number of doctrinal positions of which biblical believers can disagree and yet can still function and partner together. How gender roles function together is one of those areas. There is a reason healthy, biblical churches have different views on this issue. There is a certain level of humility that must be maintained when the level of difficulty is high in the pursuit of maintaining hermeneutical consistency within a theological viewpoint outside of those foundational doctrines. Theology is not an exact science, and therefore, grace and love must permeate differences of opinion and conviction.

While the above position is the best attempt by the Grace Gathering elders to be true to the whole council of God and Scripture with the subject at hand, the elders are fallible men. The authority of God comes from his word. It is the interpretation of his word that is prone to human error. In this regard the issue is always “degrees” of certainty. Members at Grace are completely free to have personal positions that give more or less freedom for women in these roles, and the elders welcome challenge as it desires the church to be Berean (Acts 17:11)

The only thing the elders expect is that within these discussions and debate love and grace permeate the dialogue. Church members are not called to always agree with their leader but they are called to follow and respect them (I Peter 5:5-7, Heb. 13:17).

The elders will continue to come back to Scripture and seek God in all aspects of doctrinal purity and encourage members within the congregation to do the same as we follow Jesus who is the head and ultimate authority of his church. To God be the glory!