

A Position Paper on Women in Christian Ministry

Introduction

What is the God-designed role of women in the Church? Can women publicly pray? preach? prophesy? teach? lead? These are crucial questions, all of which have been intensely debated for many years, with opinions still varying widely. The following paper is my contribution to the discussion.

In this paper I am going to argue that the N.T. teaches that there are no permanent prohibitions or limitations that should keep women from participation in all the ministries of the church. Or to state it positively, I will attempt to demonstrate that the N.T. teaches that women can participate with men in the full range of Church ministries and leadership. In order to do this I will treat all the major texts that pertain to this issue as well as important hermeneutical considerations.

One important hermeneutical note must be made from the outset. As I address various texts in this essay I want it to be clear that I am arguing that the texts of the New Testament *as a whole* provide a basis for the full participation of women in ministry. This idea comes from the conviction that it is dangerous to build any theological belief on a single, isolated text. Rather, as the voices of various texts sing in concert, a theology might then emerge. So each text addressed should not be seen as an attempt to solve all the issues, rather it should be seen as something that together with other texts forms a solid argument.

KEY TEXTS

1. Women in Jesus' ministry: Preachers of the Gospel

Though Jesus' ministry did vastly more for the role and status of women than I have space to cover here, there are two specific narratives I want to focus on that are pertinent for our study. The first is the Samaritan woman at the well. After her encounter with Jesus she returns to her town and publicly "testifies" to men and women what has happened. The book of John reports that "many Samaritans [men and women] from that town believed in him [Jesus] because of the woman's testimony (4:39)." The word for "testimony" μαρτυρέω, is very important. Elsewhere in the book of John this same word is used to describe the whole ministry of John the Baptist (1:15). It is also what God the father (5:32), miracles (10:25), and the Holy Spirit (15:26) do in order to validate Jesus' ministry (5:32). It is also how the author of the gospel summarizes his own work (21:24). There are many other occurrences in the N.T. of similar kind, but one sticks out loudly. In the book of Acts, the risen Lord uses this word to summarize the preaching and teaching ministry that Paul has done in Jerusalem and what he will do in Rome: "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'" Acts 23:11

In summary, if this woman can be given equal honor with John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle John in terms of her authority and ability to "testify", publicly, to the Lordship of Jesus, then let us keep in that tradition and let all women who have tasted the living water testify to the living water so that whole towns of people who do not believe will do so "because of the woman's testimony (John 4:39)."

The second narrative is the women at the resurrection. As we all know, the women were the first to witness the resurrected Jesus. Matthew reports that when Jesus appeared to the women he told them to "Go and tell (Mt. 28:10)" the disciples what had happened. John reports that after witnessing the resurrected Jesus they came "announcing to the disciples (John 20:18)"

that Jesus had risen. The word for “tell” and “announce” is the same root, coming from ἀναγγέλλω, and it is also very significant. The basic meaning of the word is when “a messenger brings news.¹” It is used earlier in Matthew to describe Jesus’ ministry of preaching and teaching, how he will “proclaim (Matt 12:18)” to the Gentiles. It is used in 1 John 1:2-3 to summarize what the whole letter is doing, namely it is “proclaiming” what the apostle has seen and heard and can testify to regarding the eternal life found in Jesus. There is no doubt that in our modern language what the author of 1 John did would be called preaching, so let us remember it is the same thing that Jesus tells the women to go and do. After all, is preaching not simply sharing a message of good news that we have experienced?

In sum, if Jesus trusted and honored women enough to be an evangelist to a whole town and the first preachers of the resurrection, to a group of all men no less (the first “elder board” of the church in fact), then shall we not also trust and honor them enough to continue proclaiming the good news of the resurrected Jesus in every possible context?

2. Women in Acts: empowered by the Holy Spirit

The book of Acts begins with Jesus reiterating the promise that the disciples will soon “receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you (1:8)” to be witness that fulfill the great commission to the ends of the earth. Then in chapter two, after the spirit had fallen upon the disciples in the upper room, which included women (1:14), Peter explained to the astonished hearers outside what was going on. His speech includes two very key points for our study. One, Peter says that what happened is part of “the last days (2:17)” which is a term used to designate

¹ Julius Schniewind, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), Vol. 1, 64.

the dawning of the new era that will be brought by the Messiah, in which all things will be made right and redeemed, old things will pass away and new things will come (Scholer lecture 2/6/06).

Second, and closely related, Peter says specifically that:

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.” Acts 2:17-18

The key thing to notice is that in the last days, which have begun through Jesus, God will pour out his spirit on women (“*daughters*”, “*female servants*”), so that they can participate in God’s work like they never have before. I.H. Marshall bears out the significance as he explains that the point of this passage is that “God is going to pour out his Spirit upon all people, i.e. upon all kinds of people and not just upon the prophets, kings and priests, as had been the case in Old Testament times.²” So this is one of the “new things” that God was doing; while it used to be that the male priests, kings and prophets were the primary ones anointed by the Spirit to do God’s mission, now, in this new era, those past barriers of age, class and gender have been broken down so that young people, slaves and *even* women are anointed by God’s spirit for the work of fulfilling God’s great commission. (Pierce and Groothuis 465)(note: Pierce and Groothuis will be “PG” from now on). This is a radical idea and it’s implications are vast. The pouring out of The Spirit is what Jesus promised as the authority to go and carry on his kingdom advancing mission to the whole world. Therefore when the Holy Spirit was poured out in equal measure upon men and women at Pentecost and after, God was officially commissioning women to join men as equal ministers in the army of God that was to go to the ends of the earth together, advancing God’s Kingdom.

² I.H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostle: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 73.

3. Paul's Coworkers in church planting

In Paul's letters he names 54 men, who we can assume, because of their mention, were in some way leaders in their respective churches. What might be surprising to some is that Paul also mentions 13 women (12 actually, but Lydia is mentioned in Acts), and in each case he gives enough information about them that we can be sure that they were in some way leaders in their respective churches. So even if we grant that all the men mentioned were leaders, that means that almost 20 percent of Paul's named church leaders were women! That is very significant evidence to bear in mind for this discussion, even more so after we examine what those leadership roles were, especially since before Pentecost there were zero women in official leadership.

Lydia, Chloe, Nympha and Apphia: House church leaders

Acts 16:14-15,40 accounts to us that after Lydia was converted through Paul's preaching, her household was converted and then Paul later visited her house and the brethren there, which infers that she had a church in her home. In Colossians 4:15 Paul sends his greeting to "Nympha and the church in her house." Gordon Fee, an eminent New Testament scholar, emphasizes that given the cultural/social situation in the first century, there is no way that a host did not have significant leadership in what happened in their house. He says "the patron of a household gave leadership to the church that functioned in the context of that household; indeed, it is impossible to imagine that could have been otherwise in Greco-Roman culture (PG 184)." The fact that these women are mentioned without husbands makes their leadership even more clear. Also mentioned by Paul is Chloe (1 Cor 1:11) whose leadership role appears even more solidified since Paul reports receiving a message from "Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11)," implying that she is the spiritual leader/shepherd of group of people. Lastly, what we usually refer to as Paul's letter

to Philemon is actually a letter addressed to several people: Philemon, Apphia (a woman's name), Archippus and "the church in your (plural) house (Ph. 1:2)." Linda Belleville notes that since this is a public letter to the church and not just a private letter to a few friends, what Paul is doing in mentioning those three people is publicly "recognizing the leaders of the Colossian church (Belleville 53)."

Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis: "hard workers" in the ministry

In Romans 16:6,12 Paul mentions four women, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, all of which he describes as those who have "worked hard." This word has special meaning for Paul. Of the eleven additional passages this word appears in, six of the times Paul uses this word are to describe his own apostolic ministry, and we all know how highly important Paul understood his ministry to be. In three of the other passages Paul uses this word to refer to the work of other people's ministry. Thus David Scholer concludes that Paul uses this verb "to refer to persons who are engaged in the authoritative work of ministry within the church (Scholer 138)." In other words, this word could be understood like a title of one who, in our modern context we would say, was "called" to be in "the ministry." This understanding is even more plausible when we see that when Paul refers to Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis he calls them hard workers "in the Lord (Rom 16:12)."

Euodia and Syntyche: "coworkers" with Paul

In Philippians 4:3 Paul mentions these two women by name and describes them as those "who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my coworkers." Two things are notable here. One, these women are put in a group with a man,

Clement, and all of Paul's other ministry companions which obviously include men. Yet, there is no hint here that they don't belong or don't fully belong in this company because they are female. Additionally the word "coworkers" used to describe these women is the same term Paul uses of himself to describe his and Apollos' ministry to the Corinthians (1 Cor 3:9). In fact, in that passage, Paul describes himself as one of God's "coworkers." It is also a term used to describe Timothy (Rom 16:21) and Titus (2 Cor 8:23). For Paul, to put these women in such company shows quite high regard. Thus we can understand this term in a very similar way to the designation given to Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, namely, it connotes someone in "called" "ministry." Furthermore, we must remember what Paul's ministry labors consisted of, namely, Paul was a church planter. Thus if one was to labor as Paul labored then one would naturally have to preach, teach, disciple, counsel and all that comes with planting churches "until Christ is formed in you (Gal 4:9)." (Scholer 138)

Priscilla: the co-worker in ministry, theologian and strong leader

Priscilla is another one of Paul's "coworkers in Jesus Christ (Rom 16:3)," also said to have a church in her house (Rom 16:5) which means we can ascribe to her everything that was said of the above women. Yet, there is more. In six passages she is mentioned with her husband. However, in four of the six she is mentioned before her husband. Even more important is that the two times her husband is mentioned first are contexts that refer to their occupation as tentmakers (Acts 18:2; 1 Cor 16:19) but the four times which she is mentioned first are contexts that refer to some type of ministry activity (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom 16:3-5, 2 Tim 4:19). One of the times in which her name appears first is when she and her husband met the great preacher Apollos and she "explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26)." In other words, she

discipled him in theology! This pattern of Priscilla's name appearing first, attested in both Acts and the letters of Paul, is a clear contrast of the cultural norms of the day and indicates that both Luke and Paul recognized that "it was Priscilla who possessed the dominant ministry and leadership skills (Belleville 68)." Priscilla looks like a great example of living out Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:3-8 in which he encourages the body of Christ to use the gifts God has given us and if it's leadership, then do it with zeal! Lastly, Belleville also points out that her and her husband's ministry work was significant enough that Paul says they were thanked by "all the churches of the Gentiles (Rom 16:4)." (Belleville 68). Priscilla and Aquila were clearly a ministry team and she clearly had the ministry leadership gifts!

Phoebe: the minister and benefactor

In Romans 16:1-2 Paul describes Phoebe in two ways: one "who is a *diakonos* of the church which is at Cenchrea" and a "*prostatas* of many, and of myself as well."

The second of these terms is a word that occurs only here in the N.T. but most likely means benefactor, as the context confirms. Thus Phoebe was probably a wealthy woman who generously helped many in the service of the gospel (Belleville 49).

The first of these terms is a recognizable cognate of our English word "deacon." However, we should probably not understand the term in this way, because the passages in the N.T. that are probably referring to the office of deacon are found in conjunction with the word *episkopos*, or bishop (Scholer 139). However, when Paul is not using it to describe an office, he is using to describe something similar, namely a servant or minister of the gospel. But we mustn't think that this is a second-tier minister like the "deacons" in many churches today. Rather, it is a term used to designate "one who ministers", a leader in the church. In fact, in addition to Phoebe, Paul uses

this term to describe himself, and Timothy, Apollos, Epaphras and Tychicus (Scholer 139). Thus, once again, we see Paul naming a woman in company with people doing tasks which in our context we would surely label as roles belonging to the “pastor”, “reverend”, and “leaders” of the ministry.

Junia: the apostle

In Romans 16:7 Paul exhorts his readers to “Greet Andronicus and Junia...who are outstanding among the apostles.” Take note of what just happened; Paul called Junia, a woman, an outstanding apostle. Or did he? There are two main problems to being sure he did. First of all, the grammar in Greek could be read to mean that she was known by, but not part of, the apostles. However, there is another preposition that Paul could have used if he wanted to make that clear and thus the most “natural meaning in Greek is that they were outstanding *as apostles* (Scholer 140).”

Secondly, many English bible translations have the name Junias here, a male name. But this is not accurate since Junia, a clearly female name, is what appears in the greek manuscripts of the New Testament. However, some translation committees assume that the writer must have forgotten to add the last letter and make it a male name. Yet, there is not one single greek manuscript of this time period in which the male name Junias occurs. So why is there a male name in many English translations? The bottom line: the male-dominated translation committees didn't have room in their theology for a female apostle, even at the expense of clear scholarship!

Furthermore, her name is paired with Andronicus (male name) in a similar way as Priscilla and Aquila, showing that they were most likely a husband and wife ministry team. Thus we can be confident that Junia functioned in the role/office of church planting apostle that Paul

so frequently talked about. (Scholer 140) Wow! Let that marinate in your melon for a while.

In conclusion, this evidence must be kept on the forefront of our minds throughout the discussion because it reveals at least some of the ways in which Paul actually interacted with women in ministry. From the N.T. data, we can be very confident that in Paul's ministry women were: house church leaders, hard-workers, coworkers, ministers, benefactors, church planters and at least one apostle! What I think is most remarkable of all is that in the four ways in which Paul describes his own ministry (of which he is so proud and so convinced of its importance): hard-worker, coworker, minister and apostle (which includes teaching and preaching), he sees no problem at all describing women in the exact same fashion. In other words, Paul treats women as absolute equals in ministry, with absolutely no qualifications or limitations.

And let us remember that when I speak of "house church" leaders, I mean what we would today call all "church leaders." There was no other kind of churches at the time, other than house churches. The church didn't own public-building gathering places until after Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in A.D. 312. So the only context of "church" in the New Testament is house churches. So everything Paul writes to New Testament churches are house churches, of which women are clearly leaders, according to how Paul speaks of them. In other words, Paul makes it clear that the women who were his coworkers were a normal part of leadership in the only expression of church that was known in that time.

Some of us think that women can function in ministry and leadership roles as long as it's in a smaller, less public setting, like a home. But that is not a biblical argument. That is our cultural comfortabilities informing our perspective. The only church leadership and ministry roles anyone had in the 1st century were what we now called home groups, house church, missional community, etc. Just because what we usually think of as church (in a building with a

large amount of people) is different than what the early church experienced in homes, doesn't mean that Paul's acceptance of women in leadership roles of church should be any different for us. We should be willing to take the principle of accepting and valuing women in all functions of ministry as Paul did and plug that in to our cultural context of church.

4. Spiritual Gifts and their role in ministry

This section will be brief but nevertheless vital (and it deserves more attention elsewhere). Of the many passages that talk about spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31; Eph 4:7-16; 1 Thess 5:16-22; 1 Pet 4:7-11) there is no hint whatsoever in any of the passages that gifts are gender specific. Rather, what is stressed in several is that God is sovereign over gift-giving and He disperses gifts as He pleases. Furthermore, within the passages, there are no restrictions at all on the usage of gifts in certain "gender appropriate" contexts. For example, in Romans 12:3-8 Paul addresses the whole church and tells them how they are part of a body in which each member is "dependent" (strong word) on the other's gifts, so each should use their gifts, according to what God has given them. Then he goes on to exemplify: the one gifted in serving should serve, in teaching should teach, in leading, should lead with diligence, etc. It is key to notice that nowhere does he switch to addressing just men nor does he put any limitations on the gifts that God gives to women. For example, he does not say if God has gifted you to teach, then teach everyone if you are a man and only the women and children if you are a woman. Nor does he say, if you are gifted to lead then lead everyone if you are a man and only women and children if you are a woman. If Paul thought women were only supposed to lead and teach in certain situations, this would be the obvious and necessary time to make that clear. But he is silent; and his silence speaks volumes. His exhortation is clear to both men and women: you

are all a part of a body that needs each other's gifts, so, men and women, if you are gifted to teach, then teach; if you are gifted to lead, then lead, if you are gifted to prophesy then prophesy!, etc. We would do well in our churches today if we would let the body build itself up by unleashing both men and women to minister as they are gifted.

The effectiveness of every local church fulfilling its mission is on the line here. Paul makes clear in Ephesians 4 that the purpose of the God giving spiritual gifts and the 5-fold ministry roles to the body of Christ is so that every local church body can build itself up to actually become more like Jesus: *"...We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."* Ephesians 4:15-16

What an incredible destiny God has for every local church body: to become more and more like Jesus so that we can represent him to the world! But notice that this goal is contingent upon "when each part is working properly." Could it be that many local church are anemic in their representation of Christ because they have forced half of God's army to remain mostly on the sidelines of ministry? Yes!! We are engaged in a cosmic struggle with demonic forces of darkness; we need every man and woman fully participating in every possible way to let the grace of God flow through them to strengthen the body to become the fullness that Christ designed us to be. Let us leave half of God's army on the sideline no longer!

5. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 Headship and headcoverings

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife^a is her husband,^b and the head of Christ is God. ⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵ but every wife^[c] who prays

or prophecies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven.⁶ For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man.⁸ For man was not made from woman, but woman from man.⁹ Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.¹⁰ That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels¹¹ Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman;¹² for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered?¹⁴ Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him,¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering.¹⁶ If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God. 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 (ESV)

This text is one of several that complementarians repeatedly cite as proof that God has ordained male leadership only. Before we get into the diverging opinions on this text, there is one thing that no one can or does deny that this text demonstrates, namely that public praying and public prophesying by women was a regular part of the worship services at Corinth “every wife who prays or prophesies...”(11:5).

A woman publicly speaking in church is assumed as a normal practice in Paul’s churches (This is important for some of the other texts we look at later). This text is about how women and men should pray and prophesy correctly; it is assumed that women are praying and prophesying publicly and regularly. Thus, regular, public praying and prophesying should be added to our understanding of what women can do in ministry.

Now let’s turn to where the disagreements begin. Doriani argues along the normal complementarian line regarding this text, which is that in this text “Paul wanted men and women to give visible tokens that men lead and that women exercise their gifts within that leadership (Doriani 79).” The visible token Doriani refers to is short hair for a man and a head covering for a woman, which Doriani claims represented that a woman was submissive to her husband. Conversely, to not wear a head covering was understood as a sexual invitation to other men and

thus seen as rebelling against her husband's authority (Doriani 79). Doriani claims that the argument for male leadership in the church and home is strengthened by the fact that Paul opens this section on head coverings by stating that "I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (11:3)" and then goes on to state that for this reason a women ought to wear a head-covering. Furthermore, Paul also adds that "For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man (11:7-9)." Thus Doriani concludes that this passage plainly teaches that male leadership alone is God-ordained since it is firmly grounded in the created order. I admit that this is a very plausible interpretation. In fact, if I had read no other possible explanations, I could feel confident that this is right.

However, I feel Gordon Fee sets forth an argument that is more compelling. Before getting into Fee's argument I want to assert something that people on both sides of the issue agree on regarding this text. Paul's appeal to "headship" is understood by everyone as a play on words. Paul uses the word "head" to talk about a women's literal physical head as well as her metaphorical "head" which is her husband, or men. Paul argues that women/wives should wear a covering on their physical head because not to do so would bring cultural disgrace to their metaphorical head, men/husbands. This is seen when Paul says that women should wear head coverings because "I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God (11:3)." Thus the crucial question is: What is the meaning of head? What Fee argues is that Paul's teaching of men as the "head" of women in this context does not imply God given authority over women. Rather, it is used in the sense of physical "source of being." For example, 11:8 says "man was not made from woman, but woman

from man.” Fee sees this verse as an illustration of what “head” means, and it is a meaning that refers to creation in which man was literally the source of being of woman.

Fee’s interpretation of “head” is strengthened when one takes note of important background information regarding what was going on in the church at Corinth. Since this text is about male-female relationships, Fee begins by looking for clues as to what is happening in Corinth between men and women. He observes that in general this was a community that had an over-realized eschatology, meaning they thought the kingdom of God had fully arrived and they were participating in it. As a consequence, they were overly excited about speaking in tongues and other manifestations of the spirit in general (13:1), and they were fascinated with “wisdom” (1 Cor 1-4) and “knowledge” (1 Cor 8-10). Specifically regarding male-female relationships, Fee points out that there were some women who, because of their over-realized eschatology, were rejecting the marriage bed (7:1-7), arguing for divorce (7:10-16) and discouraging virgins to get married (7:25-38). Thus Fee posits that what could have been happening was a subtle move toward androgyny in which “distinctions between men and women are of little value (PG 159)” because they thought they were already in the resurrection life in which there is no distinctions between man and woman (e.g. there is no marrying or giving in marriage as Jesus said). Given a move toward androgyny, it is easy to see how “head” should be understood as “source of being”, since it would serve perfectly for Paul as a way of emphasizing that the creation-order distinction of male and female is still in effect.

The main reason to understand “head” as “source of being”, Fee argues, is that if we don’t and instead take it to mean “male-leadership”, that would mean Paul’s statements that man is the “image and glory of God” but “women is the glory of man” is not an illustration of what head means (i.e. source), as Fee says, but a reason for male-headship. And if this is seen as a

reason for male headship, then what is Paul saying, other than skating dangerously close to arguing that men are the leaders because they are made in the image of God and women are not? This was a very common 1st century belief, but personally, I don't think Paul was going there, after all, that would plainly contradict the creation narrative in which "God created humankind in his image... male and female he created them (Gen 1:27)."

Furthermore, verses 11-12 strengthen Fee's interpretation. They come just after Paul's words about headship and seem to be intentionally added lest there be anyone who might think his prior words imply female subordination or male leadership. He says in 11:11-12 "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God." These verses seem to be a clear warning against thinking "head" has anything to do with inequality. I think the complementarians have the burden of proof to show convincingly how these two verses should not be understood as Paul's attempt to make sure that the prior verses about "headship" did not imply hierarchy. I also believe complementarians have the burden of proof to show that if head doesn't mean source of being, then how can verse 7 be understood in any way other than Paul saying that women are not created in the image of God? So far, they have failed to do so on either account.

Thus Fee concludes that this whole passage is not an attempt to teach timeless male leadership, rather the point is simply to get these women who were moving towards the blurring of sexual identity to "maintain a cultural tradition [wearing headcoverings] that has the effect of serving as a gender distinctive (PG 160)."

I agree with Fee and would thus summarize these verses as: Paul is trying to combat the Corinthian women's practice of denying gender distinctions, so he appeals to creation to argue

that there are gender distinctions and therefore they must give the proper cultural expression of those gender distinctions (headcoverings), all the while remembering that in Christ, there is no hierarchy of gender relations, rather they are mutually dependent.

The mutual dependence and equal authority between man and women is supported by one more thing in this passage. Fee has a long and technical argument based on Paul's language throughout 1 Corinthians (see PG 149), in which he claims, persuasively, that the "praying and prophesying" of 11:4-5 are not meant to be just those two things but are "representative of ministry in general"; prayer representing vertical communication with God and prophecy representing community-directed teaching, exhortation and instruction (PG 149). Thus the thrust of the passage is that Paul wants the men and women in the Corinthian church to come together and worship and minister in a manner that is a partnership "in the Lord" but nevertheless maintains appropriate cultural indicators of gender distinction.

6. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35-Be Silent!

"The women [wives] should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." 1 Cor. 14:34-35

Taken at face value, this text seems patently clear. Paul does not permit women to speak in church, period! So what's keeping this text from just ending the debate, it seems so clear? Well, even the complementarians concede that though this text appears to be a complete prohibition, it must be partial, since just a few chapters earlier, in chapter 11, Paul spent 14 verses explaining the proper cultural way in which women should exercise their "authority (1 Cor 11:10)" to pray and prophesy in the public gathering. So what is Paul prohibiting here? That is where the opinions diverge.

The complementarians are unified in their belief that what Paul is prohibiting is speaking, during the weighing of prophecy. In other words it is a temporary injunction to silence while prophesy is weighed. But why can't women weigh prophecy? The complementarian answer is that because weighing prophesy entails guarding right doctrine and making authoritative declarations to the church, which are roles that are reserved for men. In other words, they argue that prophecy is a gift that is distinguished from teaching (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28) and teaching is a more authoritative gift, one that is reserved to male elders, who are in charge of guiding the church in right doctrine (1 Tim 5:17, Acts 15:1-35; 20:17-31). Thus women can exercise their gifts of prophesy in church, but then they must remain silent while the church's authoritative leaders weigh its validity. There are several reasons why I find this view untenable. First, there is absolutely nothing in the text to indicate this type of authoritative role for men. Secondly, Doriani's view of the oh-so-mighty authoritative role of the male elder teacher is not as cut and dry as he makes out. The New Testament is very ambiguous on roles and leadership, with fluid structures, undefined roles, and overlapping terms. Thus we need to be very cautious with how much we conclude about specific roles. Nevertheless, if anything can be said about prophesy and teaching, I would argue that the evidence points in favor of prophesy being more authoritative. In the three gift lists of Paul regarding church roles (Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:28, Eph 4:11), each time prophecy is named second in importance, only to apostleship, while teaching is named as third most important. Even more importantly, in Ephesians 2:20 Paul says the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets", not teachers! Third, this 1 Cor. 14 text is set in the context of Paul explaining how worship is to be done in an orderly fashion, and he begins by exhorting "When you come together, *everyone* has a hymn, or a word of *instruction*, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation (14:26, italics mine)." This is directed to the whole church, both

men and women, and thus the assumption is that both men and women will be instructing (teaching), prophesying, and interpreting. Fourth, later in the passage Paul says “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said (11:29).” And in case there was any confusion about who the “others” are, he goes on to add “and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets (11:32).” Talk about the plain teaching of scripture, here’s some! It seems to me the complementarian position does very poor work with the text on this one and rather makes the text fit into their preconceived theological framework of church leadership.

But is there a better solution? I think so. The first clue comes right from the prohibition itself: Paul tells women not to speak, then tells them to ask questions at home with their husbands, and then tells them that speaking is shameful. So, as Craig Keener, points out, either Paul is randomly changing subjects back and forth, or he is revealing that the prohibition has to do with some form of asking questions. But what is wrong with asking questions, and why is this directed to women only? Two key pieces of cultural information elucidate those issues. First, in the social/cultural context of this time, silence was expected of new learners in teaching situations. Questions were considered inappropriate from beginners and only acceptable by those who were well conversant in the issues at hand (PG 165, 167-8). In other words, after one had learned in silence for a time and become intellectually adept in the subject, questions were encouraged. Since women often received no religious education past the age of twelve, that would put most of them in the situation in which they needed to be silent for a time, while they were brought up to speed. Secondly, it was also considered shameful for a woman to publicly ask questions of a man other than her husband; it was seen as the first step toward sexual impropriety (PG 166-8). So what we have is a picture of uneducated but eager women asking questions of men other than their husbands in public worship. This makes perfect sense with the text and with

the larger context, in which Paul, in trying to establish order in the worship gatherings, must command a temporary silence on these specific wives so that they would not disrupt church order with cultural improprieties. For our purpose it is worth mentioning Keener's concluding observation: that "none of these principles prohibit women in very different cultural settings from speaking God's word (PG 171)."

Remember, "church" at the time this passage was written is taking place in homes with a gathering of probably 10-20 adults. It is what we nowadays often call small group, home group, home bible study, life group, etc. So if the complementarian interpretation is correct and women are in fact prohibited from speaking in "church", to live that out in real life means that when women attend their home group, home bible study, small group, they are not allowed to speak, ask questions, offer opinions or insights, share testimony, or even read a bible verse, or pray out loud if men are present. Does that resonate with your spirit as God's heart for his beloved daughters? Does that line up with the biblical picture of how Jesus treated women or how Paul describes his female co-workers in ministry? No way!!

7. 1 Timothy 2:11-15-Be Silent! #2

"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."

1 Timothy 2:11-15

For complementarians, this is the heavy hitter; the slam-dunk, pack-your bags, go-home-the-show-is-over, verse. This verse, they argue, presents clearly a hierarchy in church leadership. Women are prohibited from being on an equal level with the authoritative teachers in the church, the male elders. So while women may teach in some manner, based on 1 Cor. 11 and the fact that Paul's co-workers "must have said something when they toiled (Doriani 90)," they are not

permitted to be an authoritative teacher who guards doctrine and preaches the fundamentals of the gospel in the public church assembly (Dorani 91). The reason this argument is so solid, they say, is that Paul grounds it in creation, pointing out that Adam was formed first showing that he is the God-ordained leader and that Eve sinned first showing.....? Here commentators balk; down through the ages commentators have interpreted this to mean that Paul is referring to how women are more prone to being deceived. However, Dorani wants to avoid association with this interpretation, knowing its disastrous implications, so he rather asserts that perhaps this verse teaches something else about women's nature, namely that they "are generally less likely to challenge dubious ideas than men. Perhaps they are less willing to challenge another person's beliefs in public (Dorani 96)." He then finishes by saying that Paul concludes his argument with the reassurance that God still has a good plan for women, namely they will be blessed through accepting their God-given role of bearing children (Dorani 97).

At one time, before researching the issues, this interpretation seemed to be the only way possible to make sense of the text. However, that is no longer the case. There are other options, much better, in my judgment. But before getting there, let me first address the reasons why I find the complementarian view dubious. First, as was demonstrated in the last section, the complementarian view is on very shaky ground when it is basing things on the assumption of an "authoritative teaching" position in the church that is the highest position and reserved for men only. There is simply no textual support, other than this verse, for such a position. Furthermore, "teaching" is repeatedly taught by Paul to be less important than things women clearly do such as prophesy.

Secondly, based on the evidence presented in the sections about Paul's co-workers, 1 Cor. 11 and 1 Cor 14, it should be clear by now that we can be very certain that women

participated in public teaching of the entire assembly of believers. Third, we've already seen from the Genesis section and the 1 Cor 11 section that the creation account is not meant to teach male leadership. So unless Paul contradicts himself badly, or all my previous conclusions are wrong, there must be another way to interpret this verse.

Fourth, I don't find Doriani's proposal that women "are generally less likely to challenge dubious ideas than men" very comforting. It sounds strikingly similar to saying that women are prone to deception. It still leaves us in the difficult place of saying women are excluded from full leadership due to an inherent character flaw that men don't have.

Lastly, if his interpretation of verse 15 is correct then what Paul is doing is telling women that their place is not in authoritative ministry, rather it is in the home bearing children. While I am not against mothers nurturing children at all, this hardly sounds like the Paul who seemed so pro women-in-ministry just a short time ago. So once again, unless Paul contradicts himself badly, or all my previous conclusions are wrong, there must be another way to interpret this verse.

Thankfully, I think there is an excellent interpretive option that is very faithful to the text and makes all of my prior conclusions fit together in a unified Pauline theology of women in ministry. To begin, we must look at the background issues in the church of Ephesus, to which Paul writes this letter. Do we know anything about the people of Ephesus? Yes, Acts 19 reveals that there was quite a significant cult following of the goddess Artemis. In Acts 19:27 a silversmith named Demetrius, who made shrines of Artemis, tries to incite a riot against Paul because "there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." When the people heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! (19:27-

28)”...then “for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! (19:34).”

So what is this greatly loved cult of Artemis all about? Artemis was supposedly the daughter of Zeus and Leto, who because of her mother’s intense pain in labor, vowed not to get married and rather find company in a consort of men. This made her superior to men and thus one of the cult’s primary teachings is that women were superior to men. Artemis also was one who protected women in childbearing, since she knew from her mother how terrible it could be (Belleville 177-8).

Does this possibly fit with what Paul talks about in his letter to the church at Ephesus and could this help explain the troublesome 2:11-15? Yes, in many ways. First, Paul states from the outset that his goal in the letter is to tell Timothy to remain in Ephesus so “that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies (1 Tim 1:3-4). This could easily be a reference to the teachings of the cult of Artemis. Secondly, elsewhere, Paul reveals that women were a special target of the false teachers: “For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women (2 Tim 3:6).” This targeting of women fits well with the cult’s obvious appeal to women. Third, there seems to be women who have bought into and were propagating this false teaching “going about from house to house... saying things they ought not to (1 Tim 5:13).” Fourth, if the cult of Artemis was influencing women, then many of them would probably reject the idea of marriage and family life as Artemis did. This would account for Paul’s repeated affirmations of the goodness of women’s motherly role, such as “I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes (1 Tim 5:14).” This explanation also helps ease the tension with the fact that nowhere else does Paul urge women to marry and bear children like this, in fact his

emphasis elsewhere is that the celibate life is his preference (1 Cor 7:6)! Fifth, attacking the cult of Artemis also makes sense of the very strange verse about women being saved through childbearing. It is first key to note that the Greek would allow the verse to be read that women will be “preserved” in childbearing through....etc. Belleville argues that Paul’s exhortation is a redirection of faith, a removal of hope in Artemis as protector of women in childbearing and a recasting of hope in God as the one who will preserve them in childbearing (Belleville 178). Sixth, the Artemis background also helps make sense of the perennially dangerous interpretations of 2:13-14. Belleville explains that what Paul might be teaching in 2:13-14 is that “while some may have believed Artemis appeared first and then her male consort, the true story was just the opposite. Adam was formed first, then Eve (v. 13), and on top of that, Eve was deceived (v. 14)-hardly a basis on which to claim superiority (Belleville 178).” In other words, these verses could be understood as a corrective against an errant creation theology and a demonstration that women are not superior as the cult taught. If this is true then these verses can be understood not as timeless principles on which to base our understanding of women in ministry, rather a case-specific argument used to prove just one point.

Lastly, we come to the key verses in the whole argument, 2:11-12. Before going to the Artemis background, we must first look to some grammatical issues, since even the super traditional Doriani admits that “almost every word of 2:12 is contested (Doriani 91).” Several things must be mentioned: (1) the word *hesychia* which is oft translated silent, is better translated “quiet”. When Paul wants to connate silence, he uses *sigao* like in 1 Cor 14:34. (2) “Submission” has no direct object and is in the middle tense which can easily connate submission to one’s self, or self-control, which easily fits in the context. (3) Both the tense (present) and the weak verb “permit” are not the way Paul makes universal commands, rather they imply a temporary

injunction like “I am not now permitting.” (4) The verbal construction of neither/nor in the Greek (ouk/oude) are used to express one single idea, thus “teaching” and “authority” should be understood together. (5) The verb *authentein* usually translated “authority” is very unlikely to simply mean authority. Paul has *exousia*, which he uses all the time, for that. But this is the only time Paul ever uses *authentein*, so there must be a reason. There is: this word has a pejorative connotation. It began as a word that signified committing murder or violence and then evolved into meaning something like “usurping authority” or “dominating authority.” Thus the text of 1 Tim. 2:13 can appropriately be translated: “I am not now permitting a woman to teach a man in a dominating way. (6) Lastly, the final phrase “to remain quiet” is literally “to be in calmness.” Put together, the two verses can best be read, according to Belleville’s extensive work in the Greek: “Let a woman learn quietly with all self control. I am not now permitting a woman to teach a man in a dominating way, rather she is to have a calm demeanor.” (Belleville 171-177).

This reading makes wonderful sense with the Artemis cult background. We can see that given the Artemis influence, women would be trying to exert or acquire superiority over men and would thus try to learn and teach in a dominating fashion. Belleville goes on to posit that if women were doing this then the men would no doubt get angry and rebel. That is why, Belleville argues, Paul addresses the men in 2:8 and they are “commanded to pray in a noncontentious way” and the women are addressed in 2:11-12 and are “commanded to learn in a noncontentious way and to teach in a nondictorial way.” (Belleville 177)

In sum, this is a terribly difficult passage. Both complementarians and egalitarians have struggled to make sense of all its complexities. Nevertheless I am persuaded that Belleville’s interpretation is far more compelling than Doriani’s. Thus what I conclude from this passage is that Paul was making a case-specific prohibition against an improper way of women teaching

men. Therefore there is nothing in this passage that would limit a woman in other times and cultures, not caught up in the Artemis cult, from exercising a gift of teaching.

8. The redemptive ethic of Galatians 3:28

I want to look at one final text, Galatians 3:28. This text teaches that *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* This text doesn’t directly speak about women in ministry but its ethical implications do. To see this, we need to first of all recognize, as many prominent scholars do, that this text is a reflection of what Paul himself calls “new creation” theology in Gal 6:15. It is similar to the Acts 2 passage in that it is a theology about the redemptive work begun in Christ, namely that the old order of things has passed away and a new order has begun (2 Cor 5:17). The full and perfected kingdom of God still lies in the future, but it has invaded the present in powerful ways. Gordon Fee argues, in concert with a myriad of N.T. scholars, that this new creation theology “lies at the heart of everything Paul thinks and does (PG 178).” Thus when we read that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”, we have to see that this will have profound ethical implications. Fee helps us see this by noting that Paul lived in a culture “where position and status preserved order through basically uncrossable boundaries, and where attempting to cross those boundaries brought shame instead of honor (a core value of the culture) (PG 180).” Thus when Paul declares those boundaries have been demolished in Christ, there must have been huge ethical implications. I once heard a wise man say (paraphrased), “to say there will not be profound ethical implications for women in ministry from a text like Gal. 3:28 is like being in an all white church in the South in the early 60’s and saying that the congregation would imagine no

ethical implications from the pastor's declaration that God loves black people as much as God loves white people." There must have been ethical implications in Gal 3:28, and indeed there were. Given the centrality of the new creation in Paul's life, we can be sure that the outworking of the text like Galatians 3:28 would look something like his absolutely counter-cultural exhortations to mutual submission and Christ-like sacrificial love in marriage or something like the appeal to Philemon to receive a runaway slave back as an equal brother in the Lord or in fact his welcome inclusion of women as equal co-ministers in advancing the gospel.

I would also like to make a kingdom-minded proposal to my complementarian friends like John Piper. Since we both make ethical applications from our understanding of scripture, I suggest we make those applications in accord with the "new creation"/"kingdom of God" forward trajectory in scripture instead of an even more restrictive ethic than the text demands! Let me illustrate what I am talking about. In your book about the roles of men and women you write the opening chapter which gives a vision for what biblical manhood and womanhood is. In attempting to set up an ethic for application that reflects the complementarian position, you propose the following: when trying to determine what is an appropriate amount of influence for a women to have over a man you claim that influence can be described along two continuums: "personal to non-personal and directive to non-directive." You then assert that "to the degree that a woman's influence over man is personal and directive it will generally offend a man's good, God-given sense of responsibility and leadership, and thus controvert God's created order (Piper 51)." Thus a women's proper place is to limit her interaction with men to activities that are non-personal and non-directive. Unless my exegesis of the New Testament in this entire paper is just dead wrong, it seems to me that you are applying an ethic onto women that is far more restrictive than what we plainly see in the New Testament. Every woman Paul names as his coworkers

would absolutely have leadership responsibilities that would be what you describe as both personal and/or directive to men, such as when Priscilla met with the great preacher Apollos and “explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26).” That is both personal and directive! So I propose that you move in a different direction. Let’s have an ethic that moves toward the fulfillment of the new creation where all forms of oppression will be abolished, and not one that is even more restrictive than the plain examples of the New Testament.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when we look at the reality that women in the New Testament are empowered by Jesus to preach the good news, empowered by the Spirit in Acts to fulfill the great commission, equal co-ministers with Paul in his church-planting movement, receivers of spiritual gifts for the edification of the entire body, and restricted only by specific cultural situations, the arc of the New Testament texts *as a whole* provide a solid basis for the full participation of women in all forms of ministry that advance God’s Kingdom here on earth, as it is in heaven. So let’s unleash the full army of God and storm the gates of hell!

Bibliography

Belleville, L.L. *Women Leaders and the Church: 3 Crucial Questions*. (3 Crucial Questions.) Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Dorani, Dan. *Women and Ministry: What the Bible Teaches*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003.

Kittel, Gerhard, G.W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976.

Marshall, I.H. *The Acts of the Apostle: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries.) Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1980.

Pierce, R.W. and Groothuis, R.M. *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Piper, J. and Grudem, W. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womenhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991.

Scholer, D.M. *Selected Articles on Hermeneutics and Women and Ministry in the New Testament*. Pasadena: Fuller Seminary Bookstore, Fifteenth Printing, 2005.