

An Exegetical Examination of The Woman's Role in the Church

A Position Paper

by

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Purpose

The purpose of this survey is to examine the issue of the role of the woman in the church today. It is not meant to be an exhaustive treatment of this subject, nor is it meant to address the issue of the woman's role in the home. We will be restricting our examination to the church alone.

This is a dangerous survey, as we must walk along the edge of a precipice with two steep sides. One side is traditionalism, in which any new idea is quickly and permanently labeled as heresy. The other is culturalization, in which we quickly unload any idea that appears traditional since we are "more enlightened" today. We must not take an "historical vote" on what we should believe, but on the other hand, we must also not allow the world to "squeeze us into its mold." If we do find it necessary to deviate from the historical positions in various areas of our beliefs, we must make sure that we have Biblical allowance for that shift. If we are not cautious in this exercise, we may very well find ourselves in a position of jettisoning Biblical truth for cultural relevance.

Before we begin, three significant points need to be made in order to lay a proper foundation for our examination.

This Issue IS NOT a Matter of Essential Orthodoxy

By this, we mean that whether one holds to the historical and traditional role of women in the church, or an expanded understanding of the role of women in the church, this should in no way be a requirement of orthodoxy. The definition of orthodoxy we will adhere to in this examination is "*Orthodoxy is that set of beliefs which are crucial to a proper understanding of salvation and without which, one cannot enter heaven.*" I doubt very much if someone would say that if a church allows a woman to teach or pray, then that church is apostate and those who attend will miss heaven. On the other hand, a church that denies the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, or the bodily resurrection of Christ is not orthodox in the least.

This Issue IS NOT a Matter of Value or Intrinsic Worth

By this we mean that we are in no way implying that women are inferior to men. We are saying that men and women have different roles in society, the family, and the church, but we are not saying that a result of this is that women are spiritually, intellectually, or emotionally inferior to men. In fact, the Bible states very clearly that spiritually men and women are equal in God's eyes. In Galatians 3:28 we read, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" The terms used in that verse for male and female, *arsen* and *thala*, refer to men and women in their maleness and femaleness. Paul is saying that in Christ gender distinctions are rubbed out, just like ethnic distinctions (Jew and Gentile), and economic distinctions (bond and free). Under the Mosaic law the death penalty was required for the killing of either men or women equally (Exodus 21:15, Numbers 35:30). Both men and women could take the Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:2ff.), the highest religious vow under Mosaic law. Clearly, the Bible teaches the spiritual equality of man and woman as well as their equal value as human beings in God's eyes.

This IS a Watershed Issue

By this we mean that the issue of women's roles in the church is not a trivial or inconsequential issue, but one of major importance. When we allow ourselves to slide in this issue, it is almost certain that we will allow ourselves to slide in other issues as well. If in fact, the Bible is clear on the role of women in the church, and we allow ourselves to be pressured into altering our views to conform to the world, then we are guilty of pleasing men and not God, and it will be but a short time when we find ourselves compromising in other areas.

Another way to understand this point is to look at the issue of Biblical Inerrancy. Every denomination, church, seminary, or group that has allowed itself to be moved away from the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture has found itself ultimately apostate and denying Scripture altogether. Although this apostasy may not be immediately evident, and in fact may take many years to develop, it nevertheless is the ultimate result of denying the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture.

Although the issue of women's roles in the church is not an issue of the same magnitude as that of the Biblical Inerrancy, it is nevertheless important. Those churches that allow

women to pray and teach in corporate services ultimately, someday, will most likely be ordaining women and making allowance for woman pastors. Those churches that do not ordain women will be allowing women to lead Bible studies, Adult Sunday School classes, and other groups where men and women are mixed.

Empirical Evidence from the Bible Regarding the Woman's Role

Empirically, what does the Bible say about the role of women in public worship? What conclusions can we draw from the Old and New Testament to aid us in our understanding of women's roles in public worship?

Women Before Old Testament Law

Before the giving of the Law to Moses, there is no evidence that women led in public worship at all except in the cultic religions of the ancient Middle East. There is no record of a woman offering a sacrifice to God, nor is there any evidence that a woman led in public worship in her family. Additionally, when God appeared to call out a nation for himself, he appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, or Leah.

On the other hand, the Bible is full of references to men offering sacrifices to God prior to the giving of the law. Some examples are Noah (Genesis 8:20-22), Abraham (Genesis 12:7-8; 12:11; 13:3-4; 13:18), Isaac (Genesis 26:25), Jacob (Genesis 33:20; 35:1-7), and Moses (Exodus 17:15-16).

Women Under Old Testament Law

Under the Mosaic Law, worship took on a much more structured form, and as a result the role of men and women were formalized, especially in regard to tabernacle or temple worship.

For example, God chose Aaron and his sons to be the first priests (Exodus 28:1-3, 29:1-9). The male Levites were chosen to be those who maintained the tabernacle and assisted in the public worship of Israel (Numbers 3). Men and women could both make vows, but if a woman's husband or father disallowed the vow, the vow was nullified (Numbers 30:1-16). In all of the Old Testament, there is never an example of a woman offering a sacrifice to God

on her own initiative or leading her family in worship to God. Leadership in public worship was a role reserved exclusively for the man.

At this point, some say that we do have examples of prophetesses in the Old Testament. This is most often used to justify the existence of prophetesses in the New Testament, and more specifically female teachers in the church. Is this a valid course of argument? Let's see what the Old Testament says.

Five women were called prophetesses in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exodus 15), Deborah (Judges 4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:16-20, 2 Chronicles 34:22-28), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), and Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 6:3). Miriam (Moses' sister), was called a prophetess in response to her Song of Moses, the song of victory sang after God destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. This is the only occasion in which she was called a prophetess. Deborah was called a prophetess in Judges 4:4. She also served as a judge in Israel, a capacity in which she was the civic leader.¹ Although she did serve as the leader in Israel along with Barak, there is no indication that she gave continuing divine revelation from God nor is there any record of her offering sacrifices to God on behalf of Israel. When the time came for Israel to fight against Sisera and the Syrians, it was Balak who led the armies with Deborah's assistance. Huldah was a prophetess in the college of prophets, and is noted to have issued a prophecy regarding Jerusalem and Judah. This is the only mention of her in the Old Testament. Noadiah was a false prophetess who stood against Nehemiah, and Isaiah's wife was known as a prophetess only in her relationship with Isaiah the prophet. From these five women what can we say about the role of a prophetess under Old Testament law?

- There was no continuing office of a prophetess. Although Deborah functioned as a civic leader, there is no indication that she gave continuing direct revelation from God or that she led in worship. The same goes for Huldah. That is not to say that there was never an occasion in which Deborah or Huldah did not speak some revelation from God, it is just that this was not a permanent and continuing office.

¹ Some have problems with the fact that Deborah was a judge, because the Bible clearly says that she judged Israel. However, in response to those who want to take the account of Deborah and make it normative we offer the following two points. One, when the time came for Israel to be delivered from Sisera, Deborah called upon Barak to lead the armies of Israel, which he did with her at his side. Secondly, the book of Judges is historical narrative. We must be careful not to take an account of *what* happened in history, and make it a pattern for *what should* happen today. A good example of this is polygamy in the Old Testament. David, Solomon, Abraham, Jacob, and many other prominent men in the Old Testament had multiple wives, but that does not mean that it is normative for men today to have multiple wives. In the Old Testament we read of the avenger of blood (Numbers 35:12), who was allowed to kill with impunity, but that does not mean that we are free to become vigilantes today.

- At times, God did speak through women. The three recorded instances of this are Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah. However, in all of the thousands of years of Old Testament history, these are the only recorded examples of women prophesying whereas we have hundreds of examples of men prophesying and speaking. The best conclusion we can draw is that the instances of women speaking or prophesying is the rare exception, not the general rule.
- No woman led in public, corporate worship in Israel. There is no mention of this at all in the pages of the Old Testament.
- Although there is no continuing office of a prophetess, there is a continuing office of prophet. The Old Testament is full of prophets.
- In the case of civic government, the normal pattern has always been that of male leadership. Only in the case of Deborah, and in the case of Athaliah, do we have examples of women leading. In fact, in nearly 2,000 years of recorded Old Testament history, there only has been two examples of women leading in government (excluding pagan nations), and no example of a woman leading Israel as a priest.²

Women in the New Testament

When we come to the New Testament, we find that nothing had changed regarding the role of women in public worship. We read of one prophetess, Anna, in Luke 1. She was called a prophetess because she served in the temple day and night and awaited the Messiah. Some say that the daughters of Philip were prophetesses (Acts 21:9), but all we can say about them is that they spoke the Word of the Lord. In fact, Acts 21:9 says only, “which did prophesy.” We cannot make the case that they served as official teachers or leaders in the church, only that at some occasion to some unspecified listeners they spoke the word of the Lord. If it was to other women, then they conform to the teaching of Paul in Titus 2. As a result, all we can say empirically about the role of women in the New Testament is:

² Some go to Micah 6:4 in which it appears as though God is saying that he led Israel through Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. However, even a cursory examination of the Pentateuch clearly shows that it is Moses who is the leader of Israel. In fact, when Miriam spoke against Moses she was struck with leprosy. What appears to be a clear interpretation is that Moses was the civic leader, Aaron the religious leader, and Miriam an example for the women of Israel. See JFB, *Commentary II*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 603-04.

- There is no example of a woman elder, pastor, or teacher. Priscilla taught Apollos along with her husband Aquila, but there is no record that she took that task on herself or that she taught publicly in the Church.
- There is no example of any woman delivering a message or sermon in the New Testament.
- There is no example of a woman apostle or evangelist in the New Testament. All of the Lord's disciples were men although he was also followed by a great company of women who ministered to him during his earthly life.
- There is evidence that women spoke in the Church in 1 Corinthians 11:5, but this cannot be construed as evidence that they were the official teachers or pastors of the church. All we can infer is that they did speak at times.

An Exegetical Examination of the Woman's Role in the New Testament Church

In this section, we will examine each of the passages in the New Testament that deal with the role of women in the Church. We will attempt to draw out of these passages contextually what is being said. We will spend the most time in 1 Timothy chapter 2, as that is the main text which deals with this subject in the New Testament.

The Negative Role of Women in 1 Timothy 2:8-15

1 Timothy 2:8-15 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

Probably no passage in the New Testament is more hotly debated than this one in regard to the issue of the role of women in the church. Both sides expend a great deal of effort in dealing with this passage. Although a first reading of the passage would lead us to adopt the understanding that women are not to teach men in the local church, many explanations have been offered to the contrary. These range from the more reasoned explanations of

those like the Briscos and Kay Arthur to the more far out like those offered by the Passantinos (who say that *authentain* “usurp authority” in verse 12 means murder.)

Does “In Like Manner” Mean That Women Should Pray Like Men?

Those who support an expanded role of women in the church say that the phrase “in like manner” in verse 9 refers back to the issue of men praying in the church (1 Timothy 2:1-8). As a result, the assertion is made that Paul is not only allowing, but even commanding, women to pray during the course of public worship as a worship leader. The following points are offered in response to this assertion:

1. **The passage makes no grammatical sense if this phrase refers back to 1 Timothy 1:8.** Even the most superficial reading of 1 Timothy 2:1-15 bears this out. The phrase does not look back, but looks forward to what Paul tells the women about their dress and adornment.³
2. **To say that women should pray like men in verses 8-9, and then order them to silence in verses 11-12 is contradictory.** There are so many ways for the Holy Spirit to have communicated to us the allowance for women to pray that it is very unlikely that he would have done so in such an obtuse way as we see here. We need to see that the context of this passage is the corporate assembly. What Paul is really saying is not the women should not pray, but that women should not pray as the worship leader in the corporate assembly of the church, and furthermore women should not teach in the corporate assembly of the church.
3. **The word for “men” in verse 8 is *andras* and means the male gender, not *anthropos* which is mankind in general (which is used in verse 4 of 1 Timothy 2).** The Holy Spirit is very particular in the words used in this passage, and makes sure to use the word for male gender, not mankind. If there was allowance for women to pray publicly, then the alternate word for mankind in general would have been used. Furthermore, the *andras* (men) of verse 8 is to be seen contrasted with *guna* (women) in verse 9. Men are to pray, women are to adorn themselves with modest apparel.

³ Douglass Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), p. 182.

4. ***Hosautos*** the word translated “in like manner,” does not mean “in the same way as the men, I want women to pray” but “in the same manner as I have commanded the men to pray, I now command the women.” In other words, *hosautos* is used to indicate the manner in which Paul was commanding Timothy, not the manner in which each group in the text of 1 Timothy 2 relate to one another.⁴ This is borne out grammatically as there are two infinitives in verses 8-9, “to pray” and “to adorn.” Instead of seeing the “want to pray” as being carried from verse 8 to 9, it is better to see the verb “want” as that part of verse 8 which is to be carried over into verse 9. This would render the passage, “I want men to pray... similarly, I want women to adorn...”

5. ***Hosautos*** is used in 1 Timothy 3:8 and 3:11 to distinguish the offices of **Deacon and Deaconess**. If *hosautos* means “in addition to” or “in exactly the same manner”, then we must of necessity allow for women elders since the *hosautos* are cumulative, e.g. elders have these *x* qualifications and in the same way deacons have these *x+y* qualifications and in the same manner deaconesses have these *x+y+z* qualifications. Since not many would say this, we are led to understand that Paul’s use of *hosautos* is not meant to mean “in the same way” but “in the same manner as I have been commanding.”

Does Not The Phrase, “Teach and Usurp Authority,” Refer to Abusive Authority Only and Is Not a General Prohibition Against Women Teaching Men?

Those who support an expanded role for women often interpret this verse in such a way as to destroy what appears to be a very clear injunction against women teaching in the church. Their view is to say that this injunction is not against women teaching men, but is against women usurping authority, that is, of seizing the authority on their own initiative. As long as a woman is given that authority by another man, or operates under the authority of an elder or other man, it is all right.

1. **The word for “usurp authority” is *authentain* and literally means “to take authority over.”** It does not refer to the case of taking authority over on one’s own

⁴ Another possible understanding is to translate *hosautos* as “similarly.” This would then put the emphasis on the attitude of the men and women. This is the view of William Hendricksen (William Hendricksen, *NTC, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), pp. 105-106.) See also the article by Douglass Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men?” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

volition, rather it means authority in general.⁵ One cannot make the somewhat obtuse interpretation that it is acceptable for a woman to be given authority, she just cannot usurp authority. If this is really what Paul meant, he would have said so. Additionally, he would not have immediately ordered the woman to silence.

2. **Usurping authority is wrong for a man as well as a woman.** That is, it does not make sense for Paul to target women only here unless he has some special purpose in mind. The injunction is against women usurping authority over men, not unskilled teachers usurping authority or teachers in general usurping authority.
3. **Paul qualifies this injunction with the phrase, “but to be in silence” which refers to the woman’s responsibility to be the learner, not the teacher.** This is also borne out by verse 11. How is the woman to learn? In silence. It is contradictory for Paul to say that a woman can teach as long as she does not usurp abusive authority and then turn right around and tell a woman to be in silence.⁶ This silence is a silence of submission to the teacher and authority which is the man.
4. **To say that a woman must not take authority is different than saying a woman may not be delegated authority by another man who is the authority.** This is a forced interpretation, and one that again contradicts Paul’s injunction to silence and submission. If it is all right for a woman to teach as long as she is granted that authority by the man, then Paul would not have further qualified this injunction with the phrases “with all submission,” “learn in silence,” and “be in silence.”

⁵ George Knight, “Authenteo in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12.” *New Testament Studies*, vol. 30 [1984]: 143-57.

⁶ The word “silence” is *hupotago*. It means “submission” or “acquiescence,” a “voluntary renunciation of initiative.” (TDNT VIII:46). It occurs elsewhere in Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians 9:13 to refer submission to the gospel, in Galatians 2:5 to refer to Paul’s refusal to submit to the Judaizers, in 1 Timothy 3:4 to refer to the children of the elders being in subjection to their fathers, and in this passage. In all of these passages it refers to submission to authority.

Does Not 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Refer to a Problem Specific In the Ephesian Church and Hence Is Not Applicable Generally Today

Some who argue for an expanded role for women in churches today would say that Paul is dealing with a strictly cultural problem in the Ephesian church, and as a result what is said in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 about women is not applicable today. On the surface this appears to be a possible interpretation, but does it really hold up under examination? Consider the following:

1. **If the truth is known, most all of Paul's epistles were polemical in nature, that is, they dealt with specific problems in specific churches.**⁷ For example, 1 Corinthians is written to deal with the number one problem church in the first century. 2 Corinthians was written by Paul to defend his apostleship. Galatians was written to deal with Judaizers who had infiltrated the Galatian churches mixing law and grace. Colossians was written to deal with an embryonic form of gnosticism. Philippians was written to deal with division in the Philippian church. Ephesians was a circular letter written to instruct the churches around Ephesus. 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written to help straighten out the Thessalonian church. Similarly most all of the other New Testament books were written to deal with problems specific to various congregations or groups of people. Therefore, one cannot merely write off entire passages or books as belonging to another cultural or historical setting. It may be the case that some of the things said do belong to another historical or cultural setting, but this the rare exception and not the general rule.⁸ It is the task of the Bible expositor to analyze each passage and determine its applicability to today. One cannot merely write of the passage because it teaches something that we may disagree with today.
2. **The purpose Paul wrote 1 Timothy was to encourage Timothy in the task of dealing with doctrinal defection in the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 1:3), and to instruct Timothy regarding proper conduct in the church (1 Timothy 3:14-15).** To merely say that everything Paul is saying about women is purely cultural

⁷ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), pp. 188-89.

⁸ This is especially true in that type of literary genre called the Didactic. Generally, didactic portions of the Bible, which include all of Paul's Epistles, were written to instruct believers on how to live and act. On the other hand, historical narrative is written to tell us *what* happened, not *what should* happen. Unless there is good reason, one should not relegate the didactic portions of the New Testament to the cultural or historical scrap-heap without significant thought.

is to ignore the very reason 1 Timothy was written in the first place. This is a book about how one is to conduct themselves in corporate worship, and as a result the injunction against women teaching or leading in the church is timeless in nature.

3. **In any case, the injunction against women teaching men is based on the creation ordinance which transcends culture and history.** Note that in verses 13-14 Paul says that Adam was formed first, then the woman. In 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 Paul states this same concept as “man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man.” Inherent in God’s creative order is the headship of man in the institutions of marriage and corporate worship. God created man first (*protos*), then (*eita*), the woman.⁹ Additionally, Paul further qualifies this in the fact that it was the woman who was deceived. The word for deceived, *exapatheisa*, is intensive in nature and means “thoroughly and completely deceived.” When Eve removed herself from the headship of Adam, she opened herself up to deception. In other words, when she disobeyed the creation ordinance which gives man headship over the woman, she opened herself up to Satanic deception, and it is this deception that has plunged the human race into sin.
4. **Taken to its logical extreme, this viewpoint would invalidate the rest of 1 Timothy as being applicable to the church.** Hence, all of the instructions regarding elders, deacons, false teachings, and everything else would be relegated to the cultural critic’s scrapheap.
5. **The view which says that this passage refers to all time finds support elsewhere.** Most notably, Titus 2:1-4, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 Corinthians 14 all lend support to the understanding that the woman is to learn in silence in the church. This injunction is not culturally based, but divinely ordained in the very act of creation as well as God’s design for family and worship.

⁹ Some explain away the headship of the man in the home, church, and society as something that was caused by the fall. They would tell us that before the fall, both Adam and Eve were equal. From this they say that in the church, which is a restoration of man and woman to God, the original equality is again attained. Unfortunately, in both of these passages (1 Timothy 2:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 11:8-9), the headship of the man is attributed to God’s creative order, which preceded the fall. In other words, Adam was the head of the first family *before* it fell, not *after* it fell. Of course, we would agree that the headship of the man and the subordinate role of the woman has been greatly exaggerated by the fall, and it is this exaggeration that is the source of many of the abuses women receive at the hands of men.

Does Not 1 Timothy 2:8-15 Refer To Untaught Women Teaching Men and Is Not A General Prohibition Against Qualified Women Teaching Men

This view basically states that this entire passage is to be interpreted in light of a specific Ephesian situation where untaught and unlearned women were taking the role of teacher and teaching error. Use is made of verses 13-14 to show that Eve's deception was because of her ignorance of God's commandment because Adam had not properly taught her. As a result, as long as a woman is properly skilled in the Word, she may teach.¹⁰

1. **Again, this is a forced interpretation.** Those who want to follow this line of thinking are grasping at straws to make their point that women may teach men. There is little clear exegetical basis for this interpretation. The real problem in the Ephesian church was not that unskilled women were teaching men, but that false teachers were teaching period (1 Timothy 1:3-7).
2. **If this is the case, then the injunction against unskilled teachers applies not only to women, but to men also.** Put another way, why does Paul merely state this injunction as pertaining to women. Whether one is an unqualified man or woman is irrelevant, in both cases the right to teach is forfeited.

Does Not 1 Timothy 2:8-15 Refer To Women In the Context Of The Home, And Not the Context of the Church

There are those who say that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 does not refer to a church context, but to a home context. They point out that the words for man and woman, *aner* and *gyna*, are often used within a marital context. As a result, the prohibition against women teaching or usurping authority is within the context of domestic life.

1. **This is a far-fetched interpretation as again, Paul is writing 1 Timothy to help Timothy set in order the church, not the home.** This is born out in 1 Timothy 1:3 and 3:15.

¹⁰ For a more refined definition of this position see *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 189-90.

2. **Taken to its logical conclusion, this verse would then prohibit a woman from giving her husband any kind of Biblical instruction.** As a result, Priscilla and Aquilla were wrong when they disciplined Apollos.
3. **This view is a forced interpretation, and one that is not clearly derived from the text.** To assert that this passage refers to the home is something that is pulled out of the hat, and is pulled out by those who would like to relegate the entire passage to domestic life so that allowance is made for women to teach in public worship.

Conclusion - What Does 1 Timothy 2:8-15 Teach?

In conclusion, we offer the following summarization of what this passage is teaching.

1. Within the corporate assembly of the church, it is the man who is given the place and authority of teaching. The woman is to learn in silence in all subjection to that teaching. This not only includes her demeanor, which is to be one of quiet submission, but also her role, that of being the listener and not the teacher.
2. This place and authority of teaching is derived from God's creative order which transcends time and culture. The difference between men and women in the church is not one of value or spiritual privilege, but one of role only.
3. Far from being a lowly calling, a woman has a high calling in her role of raising up a godly heritage through motherhood and the training of young lives. She is saved from the stigma of the fall by passing on a godly heritage to the next generation.¹¹

The Positive Role Of Women According to Titus 2:1-8

Titus 2:1-8 But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

¹¹ See Piper and Grudem, p. 192. See also, John MacArthur, *God's High Calling for Women*, (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1987), pp. 49-50.

Titus, like Timothy, was one of Paul's "true sons in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4). Like Timothy, Titus was instructed by Paul to set in order the things lacking in the church, specifically the churches of Crete (Titus 1:5). This is the purpose of the book of Titus.

In Titus 2, we have Paul's instructions to Titus regarding the role of various groups in the church. We see the role of older men, older women, younger women, and younger men.¹² Each of these groups are to receive specific instructions regarding their conduct and character, as well as their relationship to the local assembly of believers. These characteristics are those of a healthy congregation. When these characteristics are lived out, the Word of God is not blasphemed (Titus 2:5, 10). Let us briefly look at each of these groups in the order in which we find them in our text. and then draw some conclusions.

Older Men - Titus 1:2

The older men are to be instructed to be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, sound in charity, and sound in patience. A little comparison with 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:6-9 will show that these qualities are the same as those qualities to be found in the elders of the church. In other words, their character is to conform to that of the elder, although they may or may not hold the office of an elder.¹³

Older Women - Titus 2:3

The next group to be addressed by Titus is the older women. These most likely were women who had passed their childbearing years and entered the realm of grandparenting. Titus is commanded to tell the older women that they were to be reverent in their behaviour, refrain from gossip, be sober, and teachers of good things.¹⁴ The word "teacher" is interesting. It is the word, *sophronizo*, which means "to train to self control." Just like the older men are to be sensible, so are the older women, and furthermore, the older women are to pass that on to the younger women. It is here that we are given the Scriptural outlet for a woman's gift of teaching.

Younger Women - Titus 2:4-5

¹² A more in-depth look at these four groups may be found in William Hendricksen, *NTC Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, pp. 361-68.

¹³ A more thorough discussion of these characteristics can be found in John MacArthur, *Different by Design*, (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), pp. 156-158.

¹⁴ *Different by Design*, pp. 158-160.

The younger women, instead of being instructed by Titus, are to be instructed by the older women. It is here that we see the appropriate exercise of the gift of teaching for women. Instead of teaching men, or the corporate assembly, they are to teach the younger women.¹⁵ What is it that they are to teach? They are to teach the younger women to be in submission to their own husbands and keepers at home.¹⁶ They are to train the younger women to be godly wives and mothers so that the word of God is not blasphemed among unbelievers. There is no mention made here that the older women are to teach men, but they are to teach younger women.

Younger Men - Titus 2:6-8

Timothy is instructed to teach the younger men to be models of godly character and virtue.¹⁷ Just as it is today, in those days younger men were often seen as brash and uncontrolled. Instead of carousing around and being undisciplined, younger men are commanded to be soberminded, just like the older men. In fact, they are to become models of godly character to such an extent that no one can accuse them of being uncontrolled.

Conclusions

What conclusions can we draw from Titus 2:1-8 regarding the role of women in the church?

1. God has designed various roles for men and women in the church. Each of these roles has differing responsibilities.
2. When each group within the church (older men, older women, younger men, and younger women) fulfill their role, then the Word of God is not blasphemed and the testimony of the church is untarnished.

¹⁵ Many use the argument that it is unthinkable for the church to deny half of its members the opportunity to use their spiritual gift of teaching. Assumed in such a statement is one, God has given women the gift to teach men but then does not allow them to use it, and two, that there is no valid outlet for a woman with the gift of teaching to use her spiritual gift. Far from that being the case, we read here in Titus 2 that such a woman does have a valid outlet, that being the instruction of younger women.

¹⁶ *Different by Design*, pp. 160-162.

¹⁷ *Different by Design*, pp. 162-165.

3. Older women have been given the responsibility to teach younger women regarding their role within marriage and society. Instead of being commanded to keep silence, older women are not only allowed, but even commanded, to teach younger women. They are not given the role of teaching older men or younger men.
4. Younger women find their role as being that of a godly wife and mother. Instead of seeking prominence outside of the home, they find their number one calling as that of being the home.

Women At Corinth - 1 Corinthians 11 and 14

1 Corinthians 11:3-12 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

1 Corinthians 14:33-36 For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

The second two most hotly debated passages in the New Testament regarding the role of women in the church is that of 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. Both of these passages are treated in great detail in *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*,¹⁸ so an exhaustive treatment will be avoided here. The reader is encouraged to examine both of these passages for himself using the above source. Nevertheless, several issues are raised in these passages that relate directly to the issue of women's roles in the church. It is to these issues that we now turn in order to examine them briefly.

The Meaning of Kephala, Head, In 1 Corinthians 11:3

¹⁸ See the articles by Thomas R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity," and D. A. Carson, "Silent in the Churches," in *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 124-153.

Two popular viewpoints are offered in understanding the meaning of the word “head” in 1 Corinthians 11:3, that being *source* and *authority*.¹⁹ Many who would support an expanded role for women in the church insist that the word *kephala*, head, means source and not headship. Thus, they would say that 1 Corinthians 11:3 cannot be used to prove the headship of the man over the woman. This argument appears to be further bolstered by the implication in verses 4-7 that it was common for women to pray and prophesy in the Corinthian church. Can *kephala* be construed to mean *source*? Consider the following:

1. Although both renderings are possible, the translation of headship is the most predominant in the New Testament.
2. Paul’s use of *kephala* in Ephesians 5:22ff is clearly that of headship, not source.²⁰
3. If the “source” of the woman is man, then the “source” of Christ is God. This creates some theological problems in light of the eternity of the second person of the Trinity. Christ is co-eternal and co-equal with God. Only in the plan of redemption does Christ take a subservient role to the Father. To deny otherwise is to fall into the heresy of Subordinationism, in which Christ is seen as eternally subordinate to the Father.

Thus, it should be apparent that the rendering of *kephala* as “source” is a forced interpretation and not one that flows naturally and clearly from the text. Paul is saying that there is a divine order within creation and the redemptive plan, that being the woman under the man, who is under Christ, who is under God.

The Implied Statement that Women Prophesied and Prayed in Corinth

Many point to verse 5 in order to prove that it was and is permissible for women to pray and prophesy in the church. They would argue that since Paul did not speak against women praying and prophesying, and in fact appears to support such activity provided her head is covered, then by implication he must also approve of women praying and prophesying in the assembly of believers. However, note the following points:

¹⁹ See *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, Appendix 1* for an exhaustive treatment of this issue.

²⁰ See also Ephesians 1:22, Colossians 2:10, and Colossians 1:18.

1. There is nothing in the context that specifically says that women were praying and prophesying in the local assembly or that they were praying and prophesying in the presence of other men.²¹ If the women in this verse were praying and prophesying outside the church, to other women, or in their instruction of children, then this passage does not contradict 1 Timothy 2:8-15.
2. In order to use this passage to prove the validity of women praying and prophesying in public, one must deal with the clear injunction of 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Scripture does not contradict Scripture, and to make an obscure interpretation of this passage contradict 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 is bad hermeneutics.

What's The Deal About Head Coverings?

Much has been written about head coverings and their applicability to today. One thing is certain, the exact cultural setting of this passage is very difficult to reconstruct today and as a result any interpretation is difficult.²² However, we can make the following points with some certainty:

1. The head covering was a symbol of submission to male leadership and authority. Some have suggested that the absence of the head covering was an indicator that the woman was asserting her independence from male leadership. For her to do so would be a violation of God's divine order within the home and church.
2. In order for the woman to communicate her proper place under male leadership, she was to pray and prophesy with her head covered. This was indicative of her submission to men, just as a man praying and prophesying without a head covering showed his submission to God.
3. In any case, the use of the head covering was a custom common in Corinth. Paul merely uses the issue of the head covering to illustrate the divine order of male headship and female submission within the church.

What Does "Prophecy" Mean?

²¹ John MacArthur, *Corinthians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 255-256.

²² See *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, pp. 124ff. for an exhaustive treatment of head coverings. See also MacArthur, *Corinthians*, pp. 251-263.

Many who study the New Testament assert that the word “prophecy” always refers to the giving of divine revelation from God. They would say that it is a miraculous gift in the sense that the one who possesses it is capable of receiving direct messages from God. As a result, the one who prophesies is one who speaks for God. As a result, they would use 1 Corinthians 11 as a proof-text for the assertion that women had the gift of prophecy, and as a result participated in the corporate assembly as prophetesses and teachers. Note the following points in response:

1. Although the word “prophecy” has a predictive and miraculous element, it also has an oratory and exhortational element as well.²³ In other words, one who was a prophet basically communicated divine truth, both written and revealed.²⁴ One could be a prophet without having the miraculous or predictive components of the gift.
2. This assertion is born out by the account of Anna the Prophetess in Luke 2:36-38. She was a prophetess in the sense that she recognized the Messiah and told everyone she knew about Christ. There is no mention of any predictive aspect to her prophecy, only proclamation.
3. 1 Corinthians 14:3 gives us the Biblical definition of prophecy. One who prophesies speaks unto edification (building up other believers), exhortation (encouraging believers to obey the Word of God and walk godly lives), and comfort (encouraging believers who are going through trials and testings).²⁵ No predictive element is mentioned in this verse.

Thus, the conclusion we draw is that the act of prophesying was merely to proclaim the truth of God. It may have a predictive aspect, but then again it may not. Therefore, a woman could prophesy in the sense of giving spiritual truth to other women, or in the act of evangelization and still be within her role as defined by 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 2.

What Does It Mean For A Woman To Keep Silence in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36?

²³ John MacArthur, *Spiritual Gifts*, (Panorama City: Word of Grace Communications, 1985), pp. 104-11.

²⁴ TDNT, VI:829-830.

²⁵ MacArthur, *Corinthians*, p. 322-324.

Those who would allow for women teachers and leaders often go to 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and relegate it to a specific cultural problem in Corinth.²⁶ Specifically, they would say that this passage refers to women in Corinth who were disrupting the service by speaking in tongues. Therefore, the injunction is against women interrupting the service or speaking up within the service to question the one leading the service. Note the following points in response:

1. Although the context of 1 Corinthians 14 is that of tongues, the injunction for women to keep silence is founded on the law. They are to remain silent since that is God's revealed plan for them.
2. The injunction is against women speaking in the church. It is apparent that many women were using their "gift" of tongues to disrupt and speak out in the service. After all, if the Holy Spirit is giving them this revelation, then they should proclaim it. Paul shuts this practice down cold by commanding them to remain silent.
3. If a woman did have a question regarding what was being said, then she was to ask her own husband at home, and not disrupt the service by asking the prophet or teacher. In fact, Paul states in verse 35 that it is shameful for a woman to speak out in the corporate assembly.

In conclusion then, 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 fits in very well with 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in its injunction against women speaking out in the church, and by extension, leading the church. This injunction is based on the law of God, and as a result transcends time and culture.

²⁶ See MacArthur, *Corinthians*, pp. 392-394 for an extended discussion of this.

What About Phoebe?

Romans 16:1-2 I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchræa: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

In Romans 16:1, we read of a woman named Phoebe whom Paul calls a servant, *diakonia*, in the Lord. Those who support an expanded role for women in the church would then say that since Phoebe is known as a deacon (the word “deacon” in the New Testament is *diakonia*), and she is commended by Paul to the Roman church, and she apparently is the bearer of the book of Romans to the Roman church, then she must have been a prominent leader in the Corinthian church. Note the following points in response to this assertion:

1. There is no feminine form for *diakonia* in the Greek language. Hence, one cannot make the logical leap that Phoebe is a deacon and from there that she is a leader.²⁷ In 1 Timothy 3 Paul does seem to allow for women deacons, but never women elders. Whether Phoebe happens to be a deacon or not is not relevant to the argument for women teachers either way.
2. Just because Phoebe happens to be the bearer of Romans does not by implication make her a leader in the Corinthian church.
3. Some say that since Phoebe is called a great help (*prostatis pollon*), she must also have been a leader since the word *prostatis* often refers to those who are leaders. However, the word also refers to those who are wealthy patrons and who used their wealth in noble causes.²⁸ The mere fact that Phoebe travelled is indicative of the fact that she must have been a wealthy woman, and one who used her wealth in the furtherance of God’s kingdom. One cannot make the bold assertion that she is a leader, and from that a teacher, by resorting to Paul’s use of this word.

What About Galatians 3:28?

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

²⁷ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 226-27.

²⁸ John MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp. 359-362.

A cursory reading of Galatians 3:28 could tend to make someone think that in the Church all class and gender distinctions have been rubbed out, and as a result there is total equality between men and women. As a result women may be elders, teachers, or hold any other office that can be held by a man. Note the following points in response:

1. Paul is not teaching the equality of man and woman, slave and free, Jew or Greek, in terms of role but in terms of worth before God.²⁹ Spiritually, all are equal.
2. In any case, the spiritual equality of men and women does not of necessity imply equality of roles within the home or the church.³⁰

In conclusion, the use of this verse to prove the equality of men and women in terms of their roles within a church is a tenuous exercise and a stretched interpretation.

What About Women Elders or Pastors?

This question has been reserved until last since if it is shown that a woman is not to teach or exercise authority in the Church, then by implication she cannot hold the office of an elder. Since it should be clear by now that women are not to teach, we will not take much time on this, but we will note the following couple of relevant points:

1. In 1 Timothy 3 it is very clear that elders are men. The word *tis* (anyone) is in the masculine form and denotes a male. Furthermore, the elder must be a “one-woman man.” This is not an option for a woman. Also, an elder must “rule well his own house.” All of these terms denote that the elder is a man and not a woman.
2. There is no example, either Biblical or historical, of women elders in the early church.
3. In the qualifications for elders listed in Titus 1:6-9 we again find masculine pronouns used.

In conclusion, there is no biblical justification for women elders. The evidence is very clear.

Conclusion

²⁹ John MacArthur, *Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), pp. 97-98.

³⁰ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *Galatians, NICNT*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 175-76.

In conclusion, we have taken a somewhat extended look at the issue of the role of women in the Church. Although it is very clear from the New Testament that both men and women are of equal value before God, and have the same spiritual privileges, nevertheless there is a divine order within the church that transcends time and culture in which the man is to be the leader and the woman the follower. To violate this order by allowing women to teach men, or fill other roles of spiritual leadership reserved for men, is to violate the teaching of the New Testament.