

Women in Church Leadership

Wildwood Community Church's Elders

Introduction

Wildwood's Elder Team embarked on a Scriptural study to add clarity in our understanding of male/female role distinctions in the New Testament especially related to the expression of leadership in the local church. Our aim in this position paper has been to apply our best understanding of the passages to give us guidelines for women in positions of leadership at Wildwood.

While the Bible also talks about gender roles in marriage, the scope of this study deals entirely with the role of women in the church (not the home). This distinction explains why certain significant verses on husband and wife relationships (such as Ephesians 5:21-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7) were not included in the scope of our study, since those verses pertain to gender roles in marriage and not leadership in the church.

The summary conclusion of this study underscores the clear Scriptural truth that both women and men are fully equal in spiritual standing, value, and gifting in God's family. At the same time, in the sphere of the local church there are also complementary leadership roles for women and men. More specifically, we believe that while the Bible does not limit women from leadership roles that might involve leadership over men, it does limit the role of Elder to men who meet the spiritual qualifications of that central leadership role.

Equality of Men and Women

By stating that men and women are equal, we are declaring what we believe is the biblical teaching on the equal value, equal spiritual standing, and equal gifting of both men and women. Before God there is no distinction between men and women as persons.

Equality in the value of men and women can be observed from Genesis 1:26-28 where Adam and Eve both are created in God's image and both are given the assignment of ruling over the earth. Some have tried to argue that the use of the word "helper" for Eve in Genesis 2:18 (Hebrew – "ezer") implies a devaluing of her personhood. This is unwarranted, however, because this Hebrew word for "helper" is used numerous times of God in the Old Testament (see Exodus 18:4; Psalm 30:10; 33:20; 54:4; 70:5; 115:9), and thus is a very "high value" term. If someone is in need of a helper, it is because they need help. Since God is called our Helper, then it follows that God calling Eve Adam's "helper" does not imply that women cannot function in any leadership roles.

The equal value of women in ministry is also demonstrated in the way that Jesus Christ relates to and treats women throughout the Gospel accounts. Jesus does not treat women in an inferior way, as was common practice in the religious culture of the day. In fact, Jesus' actions toward women were more than liberal for His day; He related to them on a peer basis even though He lived in an overly paternalistic culture. At Wildwood we desire to follow Jesus' example in respecting and honoring women.

Notice the New Testament's strong affirmation of women:

- In Luke 2 Anna the prophetess prophesied at the presentation of baby Jesus.
- In Luke 10 Mary was permitted to learn at the feet of Jesus like His other disciples, in contrast to common Jewish practice in the period.
- In the gospel accounts of the resurrection women were the first to carry the news of Jesus' resurrection, the most important event in human history.
- In Acts 1 & 2 both men and women were in the upper room praying.
- In Acts 21:9 Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses
- In Romans 16, ten of Paul's 29 listed co-workers were women

From the very first moments of creation forward, men and women are seen as equal in value in the eyes of God. This is clearly seen in the Genesis 1 account where the biblical author goes out of his way to remind us that both men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and that the task "to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion . . ." was given to both Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28).

As in the creation account where God delegates His dominion over creation to both male and female, in the New Testament men and women receive equal spiritual standing in Christ. This truth is clearly taught in Galatians 3:26-4:7 where it is stated that in Christ both men and women have the benefits of "sonship" and inheritance in the family of God. This is not to say that women lose their femininity in God's family, but in a time when sons received the inheritance (not daughters), the assertions of Galatians 3-4 remind everyone that both men and women, slaves and free men, Jews and Gentiles, all receive the same level of spiritual blessing in Christ. All are coheirs of the eternal kingdom with Christ, and all will be co-rulers in the kingdom with Christ. There are no second-class citizens in God's family. This principle is clearly articulated by Galatians 3:28 which vividly states, "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."

Additionally, both men and women are equally gifted by Christ. This does not mean every woman or every man has every gift, or even the same gift. It means that everyone in Christ, both men and women, has been given a spiritual gift to be used by God in serving others for

the building up of the Body of Christ (see 1 Peter 4:10). This is underscored in the gifting passages in Scripture (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4) as well as in the practice of the early church where leaders like Priscilla, Phoebe, and Lydia (see Acts 18:24-26; Romans 16:1-7, 12-15; and Acts 16:14,40) exercised their leadership, serving, and teaching gifts in ministry within local churches.

From the time of the early church, women served the local church using the gifts God gave them to minister to others. Nowhere in Scripture does it indicate that certain gifts or certain types of gifts were not given to women or were given only to men. We can conclude from this that women and men are equally gifted by God and should be encouraged and supported to exercise their gifts to serve within the church.

Trinitarian Insight into Complementary Roles in the Church

While we believe that the Scripture teaches that women and men are equal in value, blessing, and gifting, we also believe that the Scripture teaches that God has ordained some roles within the local church to be filled only by men.

Before unpacking the specifics of role distinction in the church, it is important to highlight the Trinitarian example of roles and functions within the Godhead. Scripture is clear that role distinctions do not stem from differences in essential nature. The Bible reveals God as One in essence, existing eternally in three Persons: God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Trinitarian teaching emphasizes that each member is fully God and equally valuable yet fulfilling different functions. God the Father is the Almighty One who sits over all things. Jesus, the Son, does only the will of the Father (for more on the relationship between the Father and Son, cf. John 6:26-29, 42; 12:44-50). The Holy Spirit comes at the command of Christ to convict, guide, comfort and empower (cf. John 14:15-21 and John 16:5-16).

These three distinct roles do not diminish the value of any person of the Trinity since all are equally and fully God. The Trinitarian roles, instead, indicate a complementary role distinction within the Godhead. The Son will never be the Father or the Spirit by divine design. These are distinctions of function, not distinctions of essence. The Son eternally submits to the Father, and the Spirit eternally submits to the Father and the Son, yet each is fully God. It is important to note that the Son does not submit to the Father because the Father is superior in essence to the Son, but rather because the Father and Son have different roles within the economy of the Trinity.

This becomes important in our study of gender roles in the church because the role distinction in the church mirrors role distinction in the triune Godhead. Just as there are distinct roles in the Trinity and equal value in the Trinity, there are also distinct roles and

equal value in the church. This same principle pertains to gender roles in the church—clear equal value, but distinct roles. So, if there are role distinctions within the church—specifically that there are some roles designed by God to be filled only by men—where do we find Scriptural support for that?

Distinction of Leadership Roles for Women in the Church

It is important for all to observe from Scripture that: at creation God gave Adam a special leadership responsibility; Abraham was named by God as the father of the nation of Israel; the 12 tribes of Israel are known for their male patriarchs; and the 12 apostles appointed personally by Jesus were all male. The Messiah-Redeemer, Jesus Christ, was also male. The persons of the Godhead are revealed as Father and Son, both male roles, and Scripture always uses male pronouns when referring to God.

Beyond being merely a cultural tendency or some concession to overtly paternalistic cultures, we believe this pattern is God's sovereign design from the beginning—placing males in certain special leadership roles in His spiritual program. This mirrors the submission of spiritual equals within the being of God. Neither Jesus nor Paul bowed to the cultural views of women in their day, whether it was women in their relationships with men, or in their incorporation of women leaders in their ministries. Thus, any argument that the New Testament merely accommodates to culture carries no weight. The specifics of how all of this is expressed in the local church are revealed for us more fully by Paul.

1 Timothy 2-3

1 Timothy 2-3 comprises a central New Testament passage on the roles of women in the local church. It is important to note that the chapter divisions were not part of the original text. We understand chapter three to be a continuation of the subject of chapter two, that is, conduct and authority for the church assembly.

We have previously emphasized that women are spiritually gifted by God and served in multiple ways within the local church from its very beginning, as dramatically illustrated in the list of Paul's co-workers in Romans 16. However, in 1 Timothy 2-3 we observe that there are some roles within the church that God has sovereignly chosen to limit to men.

This limitation seems to be indicated most clearly in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 where the church is instructed that women have a ministry limitation: i.e., not to teach or to exercise authority over a man. Since both limitations occur in the same sentence it seems quite apparent that they are related. As stated above, we believe that the clear overall context of 1 Timothy chapters 2 and 3 encompasses issues related to both the church assembly and to Elders.

Thus, contextually, the kind of authority a woman cannot have over a man in the local church is the “Elder kind” of authority, and the type of teaching is authoritative Elder-like teaching in the assembly. The thrust of the New Testament is that the Elders are called by God to provide the overarching leadership for the church.

Interestingly, in the passages delineating character qualifications for Elders (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) the clear implication is they will be males (1 Timothy 3:1,2,5; Titus 1:6). We conclude that in God’s sovereign design, women are limited from this overall leadership in the office of Elder; thus, the ultimate leadership of each local church is representatively filled only by men. This seems consistent with the rest of the teaching of Scripture and the pattern we saw with the selection of 12 male apostles and 12 male tribes of Israel.

Some interpreters claim that the issue of 1 Timothy 2:12-15 was that women in Ephesus were teaching false doctrine, and thus those women—and those women only—were excluded from authoritative leading and teaching. However, there is no scriptural nor historical support that such was the case. In fact, the only individuals named by Paul as teaching false doctrine in Ephesus were males: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Timothy 1:19-20); Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Also, in Acts 20:30 when Paul warned the Ephesian Elders ahead of time that false teachers would come, he said, “from among your own selves men (males) will arise speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them.” (ESV)

Other interpreters claim that the reason for the leading and teaching limitation on women in 1 Timothy was that the women of Ephesus were uneducated (it is interesting that Ephesus was the home church of Priscilla who was highly educated). Again, this is a view without clear historical or scriptural evidence. Besides that, the reason Paul cites ultimately for his limitation in function is not a lack of education, but the creation account, which predates the fall of mankind (verse 13). This is a further example of the pattern of God’s sovereign design.

Still other interpreters claim the leadership and teaching limitation in 1 Timothy 2 is merely a concession to cultural paternalism in New Testament times. They often parallel it to the situation with slavery. They say the New Testament does not directly attack slavery—further arguing that this was because the apostles didn’t want to create a backlash for the gospel message. They then reason that the situation with rampant paternalism was similar. Their theory is that the apostles didn’t want to rock the boat regarding full freedom for women to lead on all levels, which they go on to postulate would ultimately undermine the acceptance of the gospel in the Greek and Roman cultures of the First Century. Their conclusion then is that some of the key passages on church leadership were no more than temporary concessions due to culture.

We have several responses:

First, it is true that slavery was not directly confronted by the early church apostles and prophets, but Biblical principles were taught that lessened its effect (see Exodus 21:2; Philemon 10-16; 1 Corinthians 7:21-24; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1) and eventually lead to its collapse. It should also be noted that Scripture does not hesitate to condemn homosexual behavior as sin (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) despite the fact that it was widely accepted in the First Century Roman world, where even the emperor Nero openly practiced homosexuality and the temple of Apollo employed male prostitutes.

Second, it is true women were commonly viewed as inferior in Jewish culture, an ugly outgrowth of the fall (an expression of the curse mentioned in Genesis 3:16 regarding conflict between men and women, with men commonly seeking to dominate women). It is notable, however, that multiple verses in the New Testament, as cited previously, underscore the high value and equal spiritual standing of women, along with the counter-cultural ministry practices of both Jesus and Paul. Neither Jesus nor Paul were at all hesitant to break cultural norms regarding the role of women in their ministries; yet the twelve Apostles were all male and Paul did not hesitate to restrict the office of Elder to men.

Third, it is vital to note, as stated earlier, that God chose to institute special leadership roles for males in His spiritual economy—a consistent principle as expressed by His sovereign design from the beginning of creation, through the emergence of the nation of Israel, on through the birth of the church, even to the end of the age (see Revelation 21:12, 14).

From the beginning of the birth of the nation of Israel out of the culture of the Ancient Near East, God designed the new nation to break with its culture in numerous areas, from worship practices, to land ownership, to the role of government, to the imposition of the Sabbath day. But from the start He still incorporated male leadership, both on the national level and also among the tribes and the nation's priesthood.

While slavery and distorted paternalism were never part of God's desired will, expressions of male leadership in the spiritual realm **were** part of God's design, sovereignly delineated and instituted by Him throughout biblical history. Dare we imply that God was somehow intimidated by the New Testament era culture, or that He was reluctant to express His will for the emerging church? Certainly not. Treating passages such as 1 Timothy 2-3 as mere cultural concessions, a view held by some good people, is in our view both an unsupportable and untenable position.

Handling the Word of God Accurately

It is also important in addressing passages like 1 Timothy 2-3 that we maintain the Reformation doctrine of the perspicuity (clarity) of Scripture. A corollary to the biblical principle of the priesthood of the believer (which includes the idea that every believer is competent in the Holy Spirit to interpret Scripture) is the key doctrine that the Bible is meant to be understood by all of God's people, not just a special caste or priesthood, who, in turn, are needed to interpret the meaning of Scripture to the lay person.

We encourage and support the study of the Scripture by all believers because we believe that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher of the meaning of Scripture (1 John 2:26-27). When we begin to teach that the plain meaning of Scripture can be discarded due to our perceived enlightened understanding of how First Century culture distorted its teaching, we risk setting aside this precious doctrine that is foundational to our commitment to being people of the Word of God.

1 Timothy 2:12, as translated by the New American Standard Bible, says, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." Paul's word choice in the Greek, however, is intriguing. The Greek word translated as "exercise authority" is not Paul's usual word for exercising authority. Paul's normal choice of a Greek word for "authority" is "exousia," which is the most common Greek word for what a leader does in directing those under them.

In 1 Timothy 2:12, however, Paul interestingly chooses the term "authenteo", which often communicates mastery, jurisdiction over, or supreme authority. This is a very rare word used only in this one instance in the New Testament. Paul's choice of this word seems to emphasize that Paul does not allow a woman to exercise jurisdiction or supreme authority over a man. [Note: even if Paul had chosen to use the term "exousia", the overall context of 1 Timothy 2-3 is clearly emphasizing spiritual authority in the local church]

Consequently, while we believe that 1 Timothy 2-3 does limit women from the office of Elder or from teaching authoritatively in the church assembly, it does not exclude women from leading ministries in the church that might include male participants, nor from teaching men in certain settings, as long as a woman is submissive to the church's Elders.

It is of vital importance to remember again that underneath this umbrella of male Elder leadership, women are fully encouraged to serve and use their gifting. 1 Timothy 3:11 allows for women serving as deacons (key leadership serving positions) in the church. From the very beginning of the church, women have served in prominent ways. Phoebe, a "diakonos" or deacon of the church, mentioned in Romans 16:1, is a principal example of

women serving in leadership in ministry. So, while limited from serving in the office of Elder, women are free to serve and lead in many different staff and volunteer positions based on their gifting and opportunity, as long as they are under the supervision of the church's Elders.

Many staff positions which provide leadership over certain areas of ministry under the umbrella of Wildwood's Elders would be fully open for women to fill. As stated earlier, this is in no way based on different gifting or worth of the women serving under the church's Elders, but is instead a reflection of the Son of God, who always serves the Father, while never being less than fully God. The submission of women to the leadership of male Elders in the church mirrors the submission of the Son to the Father within the triune Godhead.

Titles for Women Leaders in the Church

As churches hire staff, they are faced with decisions about job titles. Since the Bible does not prescribe many titles for church leadership positions (for example, Elder/Overseer), local churches are left with freedom to title positions based on function. Historically, one common title for a church employee is "Pastor." Biblically, this word means "one who shepherds." In the New Testament, the noun term "pastor" appears 18 times, but it is used only once (Ephesians 4:11) in reference to a human leader in the church. All the other occurrences of the noun either describe someone who takes care of animals, leaders over the nation of Israel at the time of Jesus, or of Jesus himself.

In this lone New Testament use of the noun "Pastor" referring to a gifted church leader, Paul says, "And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV)." We understand this to be a partial list of gifted individuals that God gave the church. Some have noted the proximity and grammatical arrangement of "pastor" and "teacher" in these verses and conclude they must refer to the same person. In other words, some have inferred from the proximity of the words for shepherd and teacher that all pastors are teachers and all teachers are pastors.

That notion is then commonly connected with the requirement in 1 Timothy 3:2 that Elders be "able to teach," along with the Elders call to "shepherd" (verb form) the people of God in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-2, to then, in turn, argue that a pastor always teaches and—more significantly—that a pastor is always an Elder. We do not find this argument logically convincing from the Scriptures. Instead, it is more of a historical, common cultural occurrence within the Western church. Indeed, over the decades at Wildwood not all with the ministry title of "Pastor" have been recognized as, nor served as Elders.

Consequently, we conclude that the unification of these 3 roles (pastor, teacher, elder) into one singular office is ultimately not demanded by the Biblical text. We believe that a straightforward reading of the Biblical text allows churches to see distinctions between the roles of “pastor,” “Elder,” and “teacher.” While Elders are clearly called to shepherd, lead and teach, there can be many others within the church who are not Elders, but who also function as leaders who shepherd, and others who also teach. Therefore, we conclude that it is normal to expect that there would be teachers and pastors at Wildwood (whom God has given our congregation) who are not Elders, but who joyfully serve as the Lord has gifted them.

Because we see this distinction, we believe that women on staff at Wildwood could have the title of Pastor in some contexts, as long as they—along with all the other staff—function under the supervision and direction of the church’s Elders. Biblically, the role of a “pastor” is to care for a group of people as a shepherd would care for their sheep, ministering to troubled saints, exhorting and comforting other believers, and administering and leading in the activities of the congregation. People serving in these types of roles inside the church could rightly be called “Pastors” regardless of gender. Providing leadership and guidance to an area of the church’s ministry wherein leaders are equipped and deployed to build up the Body of Christ is truly pastoral work and can readily be recognized as such in the staff titles used in the congregation.

Titus 2:3-5 plainly encourages more mature women to shepherd and teach younger women to honor God in their lives, and specifically mentions their relationships in the home and with children. This directive (coupled with the latitude we see concerning the title of “Pastor” in the Scripture) readily would allow freedom for the title of Pastor to be extended to a woman serving in the role of pastoring women or children at Wildwood.

Women Teaching in the Church

As stated earlier, the 1 Timothy 2 passage indicates that there is some limitation on the teaching a woman can do in the local church. It is a bit of a challenge to pinpoint exactly what constitutes the “teaching” that would be forbidden by this passage:

1) There is a biblical example of a woman instructing a man (short of teaching authoritatively in the church assembly). Note that Priscilla informally taught Apollos alongside her husband in Acts 18:24-26.

2) It is clear that women can have the gift of teaching, and it would be incongruous for God to equip women to teach, yet not give them opportunity to do so. In fact, as we have seen women are openly directed to teach women and children in Titus 2:3-5. While nearly all

would conclude that women's gifts for teaching may clearly be used in settings involving women or children (the most conservative interpretation of this limitation), we do not find any compelling evidence to necessarily limit all teaching that a woman might do within Wildwood to only audiences of children or other women, as long as the teacher functions under the authority of the church's Elders.

We do see that (at the very least) the type of teaching that would be limited, as seen in 1 Timothy 2, would be authoritative teaching, such as the regular Sunday morning pulpit teaching time. The Sunday pulpit is the clearest weekly demonstration of the "headship" of Wildwood's Elder leadership. We thus conclude that pulpit teaching is reserved for men (staying consistent with the spirit of the 1 Timothy 2:12 limitation) and that this best models the male headship of leadership in the church, which glorifies the relationship between the Father and the Son within the Godhead.

The modern church often has additional group settings, like Sunday morning adult groups and small home groups. How should the local church apply biblical principles to these environments? There will likely be different conclusions in different churches.

At Wildwood, in light of God's consistent pattern of seeking male leadership throughout both the Old and New Testaments, along with the authoritative teaching limitation in 1 Timothy 2, it appears most wise to maintain male leadership in mixed adult groups like Sunday adult groups and small home groups. However, we believe that as opportunity and gifting allow (under the umbrella of male leadership) women would be free in their groups to teach and share perspective from God's Word.

A Challenging Passage: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

"The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church." (NASB)

This clearly is one of the most challenging passages to interpret in the New Testament. Three words come to mind: controversial, difficult, and significant. It is controversial because of the potential for emotionally charged reactions. It is difficult because of the lack of consensus even among evangelical expositors. It is significant because of the potential impact on how we function as a church. Some might conclude from these verses that women should give no testimonies, sing no solos, nor even participate in congregational singing...even that women should not be allowed to talk at all in the assembly. Obviously, this cannot be the correct interpretation as just three chapters earlier, in 1 Corinthians 11:2-

16, Paul urged the women at Corinth not to pray or prophesy without wearing a head covering.

What are we to conclude about 1 Corinthians 14:34-35? Are these the remarks of a male chauvinist? We say no. How are we to understand them?

First it is important to note the context. In chapter 14 verses 26-35 Paul is delivering regulations for the assembly of the church. There was a problem with confusion and disorder in the Corinthian assembly. He gives regulations concerning tongues (vs. 26—28), regulations concerning prophecy (vs. 29—33), and regulations concerning women (vs. 34—35). To conclude that Paul's guidelines are limited to a cultural situation in Corinth would seem to be contradicted by his statement in verse 33, "as in all the churches of the saints." It would appear that the regulations laid out are a universal policy for the Christian community.

Does this mean total silence for women in the assembly? We clearly don't think so, as it would be ludicrous for women to be restricted from even speaking to their children. As we have stated above, whatever these verses do mean, they do NOT mean women are inferior or insignificant.

There are three clear commands here: keep silent; subject themselves; ask at home. Below are what we feel are the three most plausible views:

1) This is a restriction against women asking questions during the assembled service.

Questions can be used to lead and control a meeting. We remember a time when we had an outsider (a male in this instance) attempt to do this very thing in a service. Verse 35 clearly refers to questions being asked and Paul indicates that home would be a more appropriate setting for questions.

Response:

Paul's overall directives appear to be much broader..." keep silent" ... "not permitted to speak" ... "improper for a woman to speak in church."

2) This is a restriction from judging the prophets.

This role involved distinguishing, discerning, and evaluating. The immediately preceding context does give regulations for prophets. Verse 29 says, Let two or three speak and let the others pass judgment.

Response:

It seems a stretch to connect verses 34-35 back to verse 29. Would the Corinthians have understood it that way? It seems hard to reconcile the idea of judging the prophets with the statement in verse 35, "If you wish to learn anything..."

3) This is a restriction from aggressively taking an authoritative role in the assembly service

"Silent" is a term used several times in the context, including the use of tongues, prophecy and questions. Note the juxtaposition:

Verse 27 speaks (tongue)	Verse 28 silent
Verse 29 speak (prophecy)	Verse 30 silent
Verse 34 silent	Verse 34 not speak

Contextually, there were several restrictions...not to speak in a tongue, not to prophesy and Paul adds questions from women, ALL of these in the assembly. It must be noted, however, that in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul urges the women not to prophesy without having their heads covered. This would seem to indicate that prophesying per se is not being prohibited, but rather exercising the gift of prophesy in such a way as to wrest control of the assembly.

Response:

This view seems to fit the overall context best. It would be consistent with Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:12. This is not restricting women from using their spiritual gifts, rather it is a restriction from taking authoritative lead/control during a service.

The statement regarding "as the Law also says" would point back to the Old Testament emphasis on headship in the home and in the temple.

The background of pagan religion (very influential in Corinth) might also be pertinent. In the pagan religions women commonly played a very pronounced leadership role. It may well have been that some aggressive women in Corinth were seeking to have more prominence in the assembly by disrupting the service with overly directive questions, or by interrupting others to deliver a prophetic utterance.

In verse 35, the phrase "at home" is quite emphatic. And again, in broader context, the phrase "speak in church" seems to refer to tongues and prophecy, authoritative roles in the assembly.

Paul certainly is not implying in any way that women have no speaking gifts, that they cannot “grasp” truth or communicate truth, nor that they are incapable of learning. These concepts are completely foreign to the New Testament.

If the third view is the best view, then we do not see women being restricted in the church assembly from singing, helping lead in worship, giving a testimony, making ministry appeals, or numerous other roles.

Other Applications

While we see biblical restrictions limiting a woman from serving in a senior staff preaching/leadership role or as an Elder, we also believe that there are multiple areas where women should be openly encouraged to serve within Wildwood. These areas would include teaching, training, discipling and mentoring; leading ministry areas and teams; serving communion; prayer ministry; ushering; and innumerable other areas.

While it is still (ultimately) the male Elders who are held accountable by God to make final decisions, we believe God has strategically placed among us women with great spiritual insight and leadership gifts. The Elders should always be careful to seek and consider such perspective as Elder level decisions are made.

A strong church needs godly men and godly women! Wildwood needs godly men and women!!

Two Common Questions:

Question 1

Romans 16:7 names Andronicus and Junian and says they are outstanding among the apostles. Some would say that Andronicus and Junian seem to be obviously married, yet both are cited by Paul as serving as an apostle. Wouldn't this be a clear example that a woman held an authoritative position over men in the early church years?

Answer:

There are several key issues in Romans 16:7: 1) Was Junian a man or a woman 2) If a woman, was she married to Andronicus? 3) Is Paul referring to Apostles [capital A] or apostles [small a]? 4) What is the precise meaning of the phrase “outstanding among the apostles” ?

Regarding the first issue, it is impossible to categorically conclude whether Junian was male or female. Junian was a form of both the male name Junias and the female name Junia. While the name Junia was more common than the male name Junias, both were rare names and we must admit that one can't say for certain.

Regarding the second issue. Advocates who view them as a married couple point to other married couples cited in Romans 16: Prisca and Aquila (vs. 3) and Philologus and Julia (vs. 15). However, two women are similarly linked in verse 12, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, most likely being sisters. Linking names doesn't prove marriage or that opposite sexes are necessarily being addressed.

Regarding the third issue. Was Paul citing Adronicus and Junian as Apostles [capital A] or as apostles [little a]? The term translated "apostle" is used in the New Testament both to describe the original 12 disciples and the Apostle Paul [Apostle capital A], but also to describe messengers who were sent out by churches to minister ("apostles of the churches," small a) as in 2 Corinthians 8:23 and Philippians 2:25. Since Adronicus and Junian are so obscure as to be only mentioned amongst a long list of others in Romans 16, it seems a veritable quantum leap to align them with the original 12 and Paul. The choice of apostles (small a) seems to fit the context better as Paul is citing a long list of both men and women who effectually assisted him in ministry.

Regarding the fourth issue. The phrase "outstanding among the apostles" can be understood and translated in two ways. It could mean, "outstanding amongst a group of fellow apostles" (closer to the NASB, NIV or NKJV renderings). Or, it can be translated as "well known to," "respected by," or "appreciated by" the apostles. Note these translations:

ESV: "well known to the apostles"

NET Bible: "well known to the apostles"

NLT: "respected among the apostles"

CSB: "noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles"

In short, we must conclude it is dubious to utilize Romans 16:7 to prove the points both that Junian was female and also openly acknowledged as an Apostle [capital A]. Thus, Romans 16:7 falls short of providing evidence that a woman held an authoritative position over men in the early church years.

Question 2

Some may ask, in 1 Timothy 2:14 (when Paul cites the fall as a reason for restricting a woman's leading and teaching authority) do you believe Paul is displaying a bent toward chauvinism seemingly claiming that women are more gullible than men, thus being unfit to fill the role of Elder-like leadership ("It was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" NASB)?

Answer:

First, we should remind ourselves that 2 Peter 1:20, 21 clearly states that the authors of Scripture were not giving their own interpretative viewpoints, but rather recorded the very words of God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. There is no evidence that Paul had succumbed to cultural chauvinism.

Second, Paul's statement in verse 14 does not say Eve was more deceivable than Adam. It simply states the fact that Eve was deceived and Adam wasn't. Examined from another angle, the statement actually casts some dispersion on Adam. Eve was deceived by the serpent. Adam wasn't, so his part in the original rebellion was more high-handed than Eve's (remember he was merely standing passively next to Eve when she took the fruit).

What is Paul's point then? It seems that Satan wasn't necessarily targeting gullibility in Eve, but rather the divinely placed headship authority with which God had providentially ordained for Adam. Satan's scheme—knowing the divine authority that God had appointed—was to defy God's providential design by circumventing the responsible party and approaching Eve seeking to have her fill the role of spokesman/leader.

Paul's ultimate point is not that women have inherent spiritual weaknesses compared to men. In truth, Adam and Eve were created in God's image without sin. After the fall both inherit varying weaknesses and tendencies due to their rebellion. The ultimate point seems to be not that women are inferior to men, but rather that His providential structure for authority should not be circumvented as happened in the fall.

The Elders of Wildwood

Recommended Books:

Men and Women, Equal Yet Different by Alexander Strauch

Strauch is a good starting place for someone who has not done previous reading on this topic and would like to pursue more information.

Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth by Wayne Grudem

Grudem offers detailed answers to some of the more common questions one might have.