

Some Vital Feminist Concerns

Jack Cottrell

<https://jackcottrell.com/notes/women-preachers/>

Women Preachers

by Jack Cottrell (Notes) on Thursday, October 8, 2009 at 1:20pm

A RECENT REQUEST: “I have a question about women preaching. I have always been taught that this is the man’s job. I guess what I do not understand is how some people feel so strongly one way about this issue, and others feel so strongly another way, but both feel that they are doing God’s will? Where do you draw the line?”

MY REPLY: I draw the line where Paul draws it in 1 Timothy 2:12 – “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” This is the only verse in the Bible that actually does draw a line between what a woman can and cannot do in the church today. The two things she cannot do are: (1) teach Bible doctrine to Christian men, and (2) exercise authority over Christian men. The former rules out women as preachers, and as teachers of adult Bible classes where men are present; the latter also rules out women as elders. Any other tasks that actually involve either of these two things would also be ruled out. I discuss this passage in some detail in my book, “The Faith Once for All,” pp. 431-440.

With the line drawn at this point, there are obviously relatively few things that a woman is prohibited from doing in the church; dozens of functions and tasks fall on the unprohibited side of the line.

The above is the more or less traditional view of the subject of gender roles. Those who feel strongly that this view should be maintained usually do so because of a strong commitment to the authority of the Word of God. Those who take the opposite view (defending women preachers, teachers, and elders) may indeed accept the Bible’s authority, but they have also been strongly influenced by the feminist or egalitarian elements in modern culture, which elevate what they call “women’s experience” to a level of authority higher than Scripture itself. (See my out-of-print book, “Feminism and the Bible,” for an explanation of this point.)

This commitment to the authority of “women’s experience,” which is basically the FEELING that women should be able to do whatever men can do, has generated a decades-long effort to REINTERPRET all the Bible texts

about gender roles, including 1 Tim. 2:12. In my judgment these attempts at reinterpretation have abandoned the normal rules of hermeneutics and have produced blatantly false interpretations of the relevant Bible texts. See my two major books that examine and expose this faulty feminist hermeneutic: “Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption” (College Press, 319pp.); and “Headship, Submission, and the Bible: Gender Roles in the Home” (College Press, 334pp.).

I consider this crusade to reinterpret these gender texts to be a good example of the false use of scholarship that Soren Kierkegaard was addressing in the quote from him that appeared in one of my recent notes entitled, “Is God Really Our Lord?”

HOW FEMINISM INVADED THE CHURCH

Posted on [May 8, 2013](#) by [Jack Cottrell](#)

I first took serious notice of how feminism (also called egalitarianism) was invading the church in the later 1980s. For the next five years I devoted most of my research and writing to this subject. After a couple of years of concentrated research I concluded that the biggest problem in this area was in the area of hermeneutics. In a nutshell, I was convinced that feminist conclusions could be drawn from the Bible only by ignoring the basic rules of hermeneutics when interpreting the key gender passages.

In 1990 I began to write my analysis of the feminist phenomenon. My plan was to write a short introduction explaining the types of feminism existing in our culture, then to write an analysis of the key passages beginning with Genesis 1-3. The problem was that the introduction itself grew to about 350 pages, so it was published as a book, *Feminism and the Bible: An Introduction to Feminism for Christians* (College Press, 1992—no longer in print). In this book I explain the four main types of feminism as they relate to the Bible.

The first type is secular feminism, beginning around 1840 and continuing to the present time. Early leaders were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott. The Bible was basically dismissed as women’s enemy. In the 1890’s Stanton and others produced *The Women’s Bible*, which gives a feminist slant to relevant texts in the Bible. A landmark achievement was the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920,

which recognized the right of women to vote. When this happened secular feminism lost momentum for about 40 years, until it was revived in the early 1960s. The architects of this latter-day feminist movement were women such as Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, and Gloria Steinem. In 1966 Friedan and others formed the National Organization for Women (NOW). Other feminist organizations included the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) and the Society for Cutting Up Men (SCUM). No joke.

The goal of this movement has been to implement a gender-free society, and its approach has become normative in our secular culture today, as enforced by political correctness.

The second type of feminism, beginning in the 1970s, accepted the goals of secular feminism but wanted to maintain some form of spirituality in its practice. Whereas secular feminism was all politics and no spirituality, this second group infused egalitarianism with spiritual power. However, its followers completely rejected traditional religions such as Judaism and Christianity, as well as any other religions that were built around "male" deities. Any genuine divine presence and influence must come from female deities. Hence this approach is called goddess feminism. Adherents embrace witchcraft and neo-paganism. They put much emphasis on extreme ecology, treating "Mother Earth" as a divine being (Gaia); they celebrate female sexuality as sacred. The movement is deliberately anti-Biblical, since the Bible is seen as the ultimate example of the hated male dominance and patriarchy.

The third major type of feminism is liberal Christian feminism, which goes back to the middle of the 20th century. Liberal feminism has the same political goals as the original secular feminism, and a spiritual side like goddess feminism. It differs from the latter, though, in wanting to maintain some connection (but not much) with the Christian Bible and with Jesus Christ. However, it rejects the divine origin and nature of the Bible. As a result liberal feminism rejects any part of the Bible that opposes feminist goals, and uses any part of it that might imply divine support for them. It unambiguously rejects the authority of the Bible, and does not accept it as any kind of norm for doctrine or practice. The only real norm for truth is something called "women's experience," which begins with the inward conviction of the absolute equality of all human beings (men and women)

regarding both nature and roles. The Bible, God, and Jesus Christ are reinterpreted to conform to this experiential norm.

The fourth and last major type of feminism is what we can call either Biblical or Evangelical feminism. This has been present within conservative church circles since the early 1970s. It arose while the other forms of feminism were exercising a consolidated influence upon Western culture, which in turn was exerting pressure upon Bible-believers to accept feminist principles and find a way to justify them by reinterpreting key Bible texts. Thus from the mid-1970s and through the 1980s major works were published by Evangelical Christians, repudiating the traditional view of gender roles and reworking the Bible to support egalitarianism. Biblical authority was (supposedly) still accepted; the strategy was to reinterpret the relevant texts.

The major feminist writings during this period began with *All We're Meant To Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*, by Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty (1974, then later editions). This was the early "bible" of Evangelical feminism; it was called "ground-breaking" and "epoch-making." Next was Paul King Jewett's *Man as Male and Female: A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View* (1975). In this book Jewett declares that Paul inconsistently presents both traditional and feminist viewpoints, and that he was just wrong on the former.

Another early feminist was Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, who published *Women, Men, and the Bible* in 1977, along with several other later influential works. She has since become more associated with liberal and especially goddess feminism. Also in 1977 Patricia Gundry wrote *Woman Be Free! The Clear Message of Scripture*. She later (1980) wrote *Mutual Submission in Marriage*, defending what has become an almost universally-accepted (but false) view of the husband-wife relationship.

A major representative from the Restoration Movement published a couple of influential articles about this same time. This was Scott Bartchy, associated with what was then called Emmanuel School of Religion. In 1978 Standard Publishing issued *Essays on New Testament Christianity*, in which Bartchy wrote "Power, Submission, and Sexual Identity Among the Early Christians." He also wrote similar articles for Christian journals in the 1980s.

Influential names from the 1980s include Philip B. Payne (who has some recent works relating to 1 Tim. 2:12); Aida Besançon Spencer (*Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry*, 1985); Gilbert Bilezikian (*Beyond Sex*

Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family, 1985); Alvera and Berkeley Mickelsen (see *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 1986); Catherine Clark Kroeger (who produced numerous works and was a recognized leader); and Gretchen Gaebelein Hull (*Equal To Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home*, 1987). The works of Spencer, Bilezikian, and Kroeger are some of the worst examples of exegesis (hermeneutics) I have ever seen.

In 1974 an Evangelical counterpart to NOW was formed: the Evangelical Women's Caucus, associated with the ESA (Evangelicals for Social Action). In 1986 it split over the issue of lesbianism; and in 1987, under the leadership of C. C. Kroeger, a new group was formed: Christians for Biblical Equality, which is Evangelical, non-lesbian, and radically feminist.

These are the forces that have been at work upon and within conservative Christendom for two-score decades and more. The secular, goddess, and liberal Christian feminist movements have plowed the ground and sowed the seed of egalitarianism, making it appear to be the "normal" view and creating dissatisfaction with the traditional view. Early Evangelical feminist writers have seized the opportunity and have reinterpreted the entire Biblical canon in a way that neutralizes anything that sounds hierarchical (complementarian) and makes it teach egalitarianism throughout.

Of course, while all this was happening, many Evangelical scholars were trying to defend the traditional view of gender roles against this new movement. Some of these were George W. Knight III, Susan T. Foh, Stephen B. Clark, Douglas J. Moo, James B. Hurley, F. LaGard Smith, H. Wayne House, and especially Wayne Grudem. In 1987 several of these, and others, formed a group called Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW—see [its website](#)), for the sole purpose of defending the traditional view and exposing the fallacies of feminism. One of its first major projects was to produce a multi-author volume responding to the recent feminist revisionist teaching. Edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, it was called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Crossway 1991). On the one hand, I rejoiced to see this work. On the other hand, it took the wind out of my sails, since it did pretty much exactly what I had in mind for the book I was in the process of writing. I did continue to produce the results of my own research, which ideally would involve three more volumes, in addition to my 350-page introduction.

The first of these was *Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption: A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (College Press, 1994). I consider this to be one of my best-written and most important books. In it I show how feminists have falsely reinterpreted the Biblical teaching of creation and the fall in Genesis 1-3, how they have produced a fictional view of Jesus and the Gospels in order to make them friends of feminism, and how Galatians 3:28 has been hijacked and taken completely out of context to serve as a blueprint for egalitarianism of every stripe.

My second volume received its final form in 2008, published by College Press as *Headship, Submission, and the Bible: Gender Roles in the Home*. The point here is twofold: first, it shows that the concept of “mutual submission” of husband and wife is an idea created by feminists with total disregard of context and word meanings; and second, it shows that feminism’s attempt to redefine the word “head” (Greek, *kephalē*), i.e., as “source” rather than “leader, one in authority,” is one of the most wretched examples of counterfeit “scholarship” that I have ever seen.

My third volume would have been about gender roles in the church, but I never got around to writing it. For one thing, my other volumes were pretty much ignored on all sides, which made me feel like I would be wasting my time on it. For another thing, a book had come out in 1995 that gave an excellent explanation of 1 Timothy 2:12, namely, *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, et al.). My analysis of this whole process is this. Many conservative Christians are not themselves capable of doing the exegetical work that is required for a solid view of gender roles in the home and in the church. For centuries the scholarly (and common sense) interpretations of key gender texts saw them as teaching male headship and male leadership. Then, under the pressures of the cultural presence and dominance of feminism, some Bible scholars have created completely new interpretations of these same texts, ones that ostensibly support a genderless society, a genderless church, and genderless families. These new conclusions were a big hit with a large segment of Christendom, and were simply accepted by many without further question and without any real examination of the exegetical basis for them—or lack thereof. After all, these new feminist writers are scholars, are they not? Most have Ph.D. degrees, do they not? They know Greek, don’t they? They must know what they are talking about! End of story.

The problem is that this is NOT the end of the story. This story has three chapters, not just two. The first chapter is the centuries-old acceptance of the hierarchical (complementarian) view of gender roles. The second chapter is the feminist attempt to reinterpret Scripture in order to provide an alleged basis for the feminist view of gender roles. The third chapter is the examination (by people like me) of the various feminist attempts at exegesis, and the exposure of their results as false, phony, and fake. The problem is that many Bible-believers have digested the first two chapters and have decided they like the way it ends there. That's where they want the story to end. Thus they have ignored the third chapter, perhaps not even being aware of it; and they have therefore bought into a fallacious and faulty worldview without realizing it.

Contributing to the ease with which feminism has deceived many are two factors. One is the common idea summarized as “the newer, the truer.” I.e., the more recent an idea is, the more likely it is to be true. And since the male leadership idea is the old one, it must be outdated and passé. The feminist approach and the feminist view of Scripture, being the more recent, must be the true view. We see this pattern emerge all the time in the scientific world; therefore it must be true for the social sciences as well!

The second fact is the often overlooked principle that in this sinful world, the will usually dominates the intellect. I.e., even if the objective evidence points another direction, we will see and accept what we WANT to accept. As Paul says in Romans 1:18, it is typical of sinners to “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” There is SO much pressure today to WANT the feminist view to be correct. This is the power of “women’s experience,” as mentioned earlier. We need to face reality here. Will women’s experience be our norm, our final authority, or will the Bible?

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Comments

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I am NOT “aware” of the things you have listed here, which are given a decidedly feminist slant. I AM aware that the first ones to discover the empty tomb and to encounter the risen Christ were women, and that Jesus instructed them to carry specific messages to the disciples (Matt. 28:10; John 20:17-18). But to equate this experience with “preaching the gospel” in our modern sense of that term, or even “telling what we know about the Bible,” is an

example of what I have called “exaggerated radicalness” and “feminist hyperexegesis.” I suggest you and others read my book *Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, & Redemption—A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, especially chapter 4, “Feminism and Jesus Christ” (pp. 149-216). See pp. 174-175, 183-184 regarding the resurrection experiences. One statement therefrom: “What is Jesus asking these women to do? He is asking them to serve as messengers and to deliver a specific message to a specific group of people, period. There is nothing about preaching and evangelism that can legitimately be concluded from this incident.” The idea that there were “many female preachers in the first churches” is likewise feminist hyperexegesis. The New Testament does indeed make a distinction between sharing the gospel with unbelievers (which is what Priscilla and Aquila were doing, Acts 18:24-19:7), and teaching Christian doctrine to Christian men, which is what Paul forbids women to do in 1 Tim. 2:12 (see 3:15). For more on Jesus and women, one can Google these studies of mine: “Was Jesus a Feminist? A Case of Mistaken Identity”; and “The Gender of Jesus and the Incarnation: A Case Study in Feminist Hermeneutics.” It is one thing to be aware of facts; it is quite a different thing to be aware of slanted interpretations of facts.

I wish this person could have read my books, *Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption—A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, and *Headship, Submission, and the Bible: Gender Roles in the Home*, before making these remarks. That God established male headship at the creation is clearly seen in Genesis 2, where we can see that (1) the male is central in the narrative, (2) the male was created first, (3) the woman was created from the man, (4) the woman was created for the man, and (5) the man named the woman (*Gender Roles and the Bible*, 80-99). The decisive point, though, is the New Testament commentary on all this (1 Cor. 11:8-9 and 1 Tim. 2:13), which is usually ignored by feminists when they talk about Genesis 1-3 (*ibid.*, 99-102). On the whole issue of the meaning of submission and headship, as I have sufficiently shown in the other book mentioned above, I have never seen a more pathetic lack of scholarship evidenced in a biased and futile attempt to prove the unprovable.

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Dear Dr. Cottrell, Your article was interesting, but I have some questions. Is the Holy Spirit promised just to men or to women as well? Which of the

spiritual gifts were meant for women and which were meant for men? In China, I've read that 7 in 10 house churches are led by women. Is God upset that women are leading or happy that people are being saved? You seem to think that we can only understand God through our intellect and not through our experiences or emotions. Is this correct? Why were we created with emotions and given experiences? Why do you seem to regard women as the enemy in this spiritual battle? Obviously, I'll struggled with this issue for some time. However, in Biblical accounts, God is more often interested in humility and in having his will accomplished than in who is doing the accomplishing. I have your book, *The Faith Once For All*, but I don't think you considered the whole Bible when expressing your opinion on women. Blessings to you.

Christine,

What China does is not the standard, but the word of God is. I have lived in China for 11 years and this issue has been on my heart for about as long as I have been here. Yes, there are a lot of women taking the leadership roles in the house churches and the men are conspicuously absent, maybe only 20 to 25 percent men. Does that sound like a healthy situation? If the church is not teaching that the men should lead, why should we expect them to feel the pressure to do it. When the women take leadership over the men, the men are not all that interested in coming. The truth is that no culture naturally produces Godly men to lead. They must be forged out of discipleship training in the scripture (like Timothy). Instead on grabbing for the steering wheel, women need to give men that pressure. And when godly men lead in the way God desires, I believe the women are happier. This in no way means that women have no place to serve! It just means that God has given qualified men the responsibility to lead.

<https://jackcottrell.com/notes/may-women-speak-in-church/>

### **May Women SPEAK in Church?**

by Jack Cottrell (Notes) on Thursday, April 29, 2010 at 3:34pm

**QUESTION:** In view of 1 Timothy 2:12, are women forbidden to serve communion in a church service? Is a female song leader allowed? Can a woman lead prayers in a church service? Does this verse not say that a woman must "remain quiet"? Does not 1 Cor. 14:34 say that "women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak"?

**ANSWER:** Here I have combined several questions into one, namely, what limitations does the New Testament place upon women's roles in the church? As I understand it, the only text that limits the activity of women in the church today is 1 Tim. 2:12, where Paul says, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." This basically says that women are not permitted to do two things: they cannot teach Christian doctrine to Christian men, and cannot exercise authority over Christian men (as in the offices of apostles and elders). (1 Tim. 3:15 shows that in this letter Paul is discussing what should be done within the context of the church.) For more detail about this verse see my book, "The Faith Once for All," 431-440; and my book, "Feminism and the Bible," 313-327.

Though it goes against a very entrenched tradition in Restoration churches, I do not believe women serving communion violates either of these prohibitions. This is a role of service, purely and simply. Here are two cautions, however. First, as with all permissible activities, the rule of expediency must be applied (see my commentary on Romans 14). I.e., even though it may be right in itself, we must always ask if it might cause harm to weaker brethren and thus to the church itself. In such a case it should be delayed until sound teaching can be done on the subject, showing why it is consistent with Biblical teaching. Second, giving the communion meditation is quite different from serving the emblems. The former usually involves teaching and thus falls under the first prohibition in 1 Tim. 2:12, while the latter does not.

Regarding leading singing and leading prayers in a church service, my opinion is that neither of these activities constitutes teaching Christian doctrine or exercising authority. We should not confuse "leading" in these contexts with "exercising authority." Authority gives a person the right to tell others what to do, in the sense that the latter have a moral obligation to obey (e.g., Luke 6:46; Eph. 6:1; Heb. 13:17). This is not happening in leading singing or in leading prayer.

But what about the teaching that women must "remain quiet" and "keep silent"? Does not Paul specifically say that "they are not permitted to speak"? Here it is important to see that the Greek words in 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and in 1 Cor. 14:34 are different. In 1 Tim. 2:12 the word is "hesuchia," which does NOT mean "be silent" (contrary to the NIV translation), but to have a quiet, submissive demeanor or attitude. This same word is used also in verse 11,

“Let a woman QUIETLY [with a quiet spirit] receive instruction.” Thus this passage does not forbid women to speak in a church service.

But what about 1 Cor. 14:34? Here the Greek word for “keep silent” is “sigao,” which DOES mean literal silence; and the Greek word in the phrase “not permitted to speak” is “laleo,” which is the ordinary word for oral speaking or talking. However, the context of the verse shows that Paul is referring to a specific kind of speaking, namely, the public use of the miraculous spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues and prophesying. In apostolic times women had such gifts and could use them outside the public assembly, (1 Cor. 11:5; compare v. 18), but not in the assembly or church service as such. That is the point of 1 Cor. 14:34; see 1 Cor. 14:26-33, where the word “laleo” is used three times for this special kind of speaking. (This prohibition would apply, of course, only as long as the special gifts existed in the church.)

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Comments

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Hello Mr Cottrell, I greatly appreciate your holistic approach to Biblical interpretation. Regarding women’s roles in the church, marriage and society Paul affirms the OT position. He refers extensively to Genesis in explaining why women should remain quiet and submissive in Church assemblies. Someone brought it to my attention that the entire OT scripture affirms this submissive role of women and the leadership role of men. All the anointed kings of Israel were male, all the priests, all of the judges that God raised up, all the elders of Israel, all the apostles of Christ, all the elders of the NT church. This include the worship leaders, and musicians of the Temple that David established under the direction of the prophet. (1 Chr 15) Worship leaders are supposed to deliver a message through song and scripture quotation. As you are well aware many Biblical prayers are doctrinal. Solomon’s prayer of dedication of the temple and Paul’s prayers in his epistles are examples. Women should not teach men. In both testaments public prayer in an assembly was always performed by men, this is fitting as they are representing the assembly to God and they are God’s chosen leaders in society and the church. So in keeping with the full Bible’s example, women should not lead worship or prayer when men are present. God bless your service to His kingdom

Reply

Thank you for your comments. You had better get ready, though, to explain how women such as Deborah and Miriam fit into your interpretation.

Nick Adams

Miriam led the women in song as a spontaneous celebration. No problem there. No formal worship assembly. Judges is a book of what went wrong. Much history without comment. For example, Samson's unrighteous behavior was not condemned in the narrative. Concerning Deborah. The text significantly does not say God raised her up, it only says "Deborah was judging Israel." God did raise up other judges, but not her! She is also missing from the list of heroes of the faith in Hebrews. The account of Deborah contains many rebukes to the men for failure to lead. A significant phrase from the song of Deborah is Judg 5:2 "When the princes in Israel take the lead,

when the people willingly offer themselves —

praise the Lord! Again affirming the role of male leadership.

We cannot use the account of judges to approve of women's leadership any more than we can approve of frequenting prostitutes from Samson's behavior. Judges is a historical book, history without moral comment. What happened rather than what should happen. Paul's teaching are explicit on the subject of women's submission. The entire teaching of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is consistent. Women are to be subject to men from the time that Eve tasted the fruit until the curse of death is lifted when Christ returns.



Jack Cottrell The Faith Once for All: Biblical Doctrine for Today "**The Role of Women in Church Leadership.**" p.431-442

### **C. Leadership and Gender**

Sincere Christians have serious differences regarding the role of women in church leadership. The egalitarian (or feminist) approach begins with the assumption that God's original creation purpose was for gender to be irrelevant with respect to leadership roles in both the home and the church. One effect of Adam's sin was to replace this equality with a hierarchical relationship where only men may exercise authority and where women must be in roles of submission. One countereffect of the work of Christ, however, was to abolish this sinful hierarchicalism and to restore the original egalitarianism. This conclusion is usually drawn in part from Gal 3:28, which

is taken to mean that no gender distinctions should apply to church leadership roles. Qualified women are just as eligible as qualified men to serve as elders, deacons, and preachers.

The other approach to this issue, called complementarianism (or hierarchicalism), is that God's original intention for the human race, established at creation, is summed up in 1 Cor 11:3, "The man is the head of a woman." The headship/ submission relationship did not originate with the Fall, but was only distorted by it. Jesus did not abolish male headship, either in practice or in his redemptive work. Galatians 3:28 addresses the equality of males and females only with respect to their access to salvation; it was never intended to apply to the question of role distinctions. The roles of headship and submission are still assigned to husbands and wives respectively (Eph 5:22–24), and women are excluded from roles that involve teaching men and roles that involve having authority over men (1 Tim 2:12).

### **1. Galatians 3:28**

In my judgment this second view is the correct understanding of biblical teaching, and of the two verses that are crucial to the debate. The first of these verses is Gal 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (see Cottrell, "Galatians"; Cottrell, *Gender Roles*, 217–301). The key to understanding "neither male nor female" here is to ask why Paul links these three pairs (Jew/ Greek, slave/free, male/female) together in this context. What do they have in common? Why does he mention these three and no more? The context shows that it is a statement about full equality with respect to access to salvation; it is improper to generalize beyond this.

The historical context of Gal 3:28 is the false teaching of the Judaizers concerning the nature of salvation; the issue thus is *how to be saved*. The Judaizers were teaching the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts. Galatians is written mainly to deny such a necessity: Gentiles do not have to be circumcised to be saved. How does 3:1–4:7 fit into this argument? This is very important: this section is an explanation of *why* Gentiles do not have to subject themselves to circumcision or to the Law of Moses in general, in order to receive salvation through Jesus Christ.

The salvation of which Paul speaks is of course salvation through Christ, but it is important to notice how Abraham is brought into the argument (3:8–9,14,16). Salvation through Christ is described as an *inheritance* received

from Abraham (3:17–18). This concept of salvation as inheritance is the key to the right understanding of Gal 3:28. This inheritance, Paul says, is not based on law; it is based on God’s promise. That is, it is received not by following the rules of the Mosaic Law and by receiving circumcision, contrary to what the Judaizers were preaching. Rather, receiving the inheritance is a matter of believing the promise (3:18).

Here the metaphor of inheritance enters the discussion. The question is this: under the New Covenant, is “the blessing of Abraham” (3:14) *inherited* according to the rules of law, or according to the way a promise works? Verse 29 says we are “heirs according to promise.” We have received the inheritance, but *how*? Not according to law, but according to promise.

Why does Paul stress this point about inheritance, and the distinction between inheritance according to law and inheritance according to promise? Because *if* we were still going by the Law of Moses, as the Judaizers claimed, *only certain people* would have access to this inheritance. This is true because the Law of Moses, embodying the common practice of the day, limited the inheritance of property to *free Jewish males*. That is, *Gentiles, slaves, and women* ordinarily did not inherit the family property. Some exceptions were introduced later, but according to the rules of the Law of Moses, under normal circumstances the only legitimate heirs were free Jewish males.

But, says Paul, it is different under the New Covenant, the covenant of promise. Technically Jesus alone is the only rightful heir to the Abrahamic promise, a conclusion based on the singular form of the word “seed” in Gen 22:18. But if this is so, how can anyone else become an heir to the promised salvation? The answer is simple: by taking on the identity of Jesus Himself! This is the point of Gal 3:26–27, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” When we identify ourselves with Jesus, we become heirs along with him. In faith and baptism we take on the identity of Jesus himself, i.e., his identity as a *son* and an *heir* (see 4:7). Even though there is only one true seed and one true heir of the Abrahamic promise, if we belong to Christ, then we too are counted as Abraham’s seed and *heirs according to promise* (3:29).

This is the only point of Gal 3:28. As far as salvation is concerned, it does not matter whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men, males or

females. The only thing that matters is whether we *belong to Christ*. The rules of inheritance sanctioned by the Law simply do not apply. Herein lies the significance of the three pairs in 3:28. Under the rules of the Law, the “Greek,” “slave,” or “female” ordinarily would not be eligible to inherit; but in Christ the inheritance is not given according to the rules of the Law, so these distinctions are no longer relevant for salvation.

This, therefore, is the sole significance of Gal 3:28. **Anyone who is one *with* Christ inherits the blessing of salvation. It no longer matters if one is a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free man, a male or a female. All baptized believers are one *with* Christ, and thereby inherit salvation.** The context shows that the end of this verse should be translated, “one *with* Christ Jesus,” not “one *in* Christ Jesus.” Paul’s point is not that we are all *one with each other* when we are “in Christ Jesus.” The point is that, through faith and baptism, when we clothe ourselves with Christ (3:26–27), we take on his identity and become *one with him* and thus share the inheritance with him.

In conclusion, as far as equality is concerned, “neither male nor female” refers only to equal access to the blessings of salvation through Jesus Christ. The context warrants no other conclusion. Those who wrongly assume that soteriological equality requires functional or role equality should read 1 Pet 3:1–7, which clearly shows that equality of salvation (v. 7) does not imply equality of roles (vv. 1–6).

## 2. 1 Timothy 2:12

The second verse that is crucial to the debate about gender roles is 1 Tim 2:12, “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” It is true that earlier verses here (vv. 8–9) include some instructions that may be relevant only in first-century culture, but the main instructions (to pray and to wear modest clothing) are timeless principles. That verse 12 belongs in the latter category is seen by its connection with verse 13, where Paul gives the creation order as the *reason* why women may neither teach nor exercise authority over men.

Many egalitarians say that this verse was addressing a specific problem that existed only at that time and only in the Ephesian church; thus Paul was giving a temporary solution to a temporary, local problem. The problem was that certain liberated but as-yet-uneducated women in the church at Ephesus were teaching false doctrine and usurping authority over men in the process. Thus Paul’s concern in 1 Tim 2:12 was not that women were teaching and

exercising authority over men, but that they were teaching false doctrine in a presumptuous manner. The problem, however, is that this alleged background situation has been fabricated basically out of nothing, for the sole purpose of allowing this verse to be interpreted in a way that is consistent with egalitarianism. That this passage actually has a straightforward complementarian meaning will now be shown, as the verse is explained phrase by phrase.

**“But” (de).** This first word, the conjunction “but,” may seem inconsequential; but it is important because it shows that the content of verse 12 stands in some kind of contrast with verse 11, which says, “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.” Since the two main words in verse 12 are “to teach” and “to exercise authority,” it seems obvious that these ideas are meant to contrast with “receive instruction” and “entire submissiveness” in verse 11.

Thus Paul is saying that women must study and learn Christian doctrine and have an understanding of the contents of the Bible, *but* they are not permitted to use their knowledge to teach men or to have authority over men. This knowledge may be used in many other ways, but not this way.

**“I do not allow” (ouk epitrepo).** This prohibition is very straightforward; it says unequivocally, “I do not allow.” This is not just the unbinding opinion of some ordinary male chauvinist; these words are spoken by an apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, one who was appointed to preach and teach in faith and truth (v. 7). As an apostle, Paul speaks with the very authority of the One who appointed him.

Some try to say that this command is not applicable today because *epitrepo* is in the present tense, which (they claim) means that the prohibition was intended to apply only to the time at which it was spoken, and not to the ongoing church. The present tense, they say, limited the application of the prohibition to that specific era. As one egalitarian says, Paul is simply saying, “I am not presently allowing a woman to teach” (Spencer, 85). Another says, “The present tense ... has the force of ‘I do not permit *now* a woman to teach’ ” (Bilezikian, 180). (This is part of the view that the temporary problem at Ephesus was uneducated women teaching false doctrine.)

The fact, however, is this: what these egalitarians are saying about the meaning of the present tense of the Greek verb is exactly the opposite of the usual and ordinary way this tense is explained. The present tense actually

indicates *ongoing activity*, not limited, temporary activity. Action described in the present tense is temporally open-ended, as in Heb 10:26 (“go on sinning”) and 1 John 3:9 (“continue to sin,” “go on sinning,” NIV). It is no different in 1 Tim 2:12.

“*A woman ... a man*” (*gynaiki ... andros*). Depending upon the context, the Greek terms used here (*gyne* and *aner*) can mean either “woman” and “man,” or “wife” and “husband.” Almost every NT translation takes them to mean “woman” and “man” in 1 Tim 2:12, but some contend that they refer to the husband/wife relationship. Paul is simply forbidding wives to teach and have authority over their husbands, they say. The implication is that this verse would not apply to roles within the church as such; it applies only within the home.

How can we decide what these words mean in this text? Since the words as such can have either meaning, the context is the key. In my judgment the context requires the meaning “woman” and “man.” In verses 8,9 the same words are used and surely mean “man” and “woman” in general. The same is true of *gyne* in verse 11. Also, in verses 13,14 Adam and Eve are cited to support the prohibition in verse 12. It is true that Adam and Eve were husband and wife, but when first created they were just “the man” and “the woman.” Adam represented all *mankind* (in the narrow sense of “man”), not just married men; and Eve represented all *womankind*, not just married women. As Gen 1:27 says, “Male and female He created them,” not “Husband and wife He created them.”

We should note also that verse 14 refers to Adam and “**the** *gyne*” (with the definite article), not Adam and “**his** *gyne*” (with a possessive pronoun). We would expect the latter if Paul were thinking of Adam and Eve as husband and wife, i.e., “Adam and his wife.” But he does not say this; he says “**the** *gyne*,” i.e., the woman. (We can say this confidently because elsewhere in the NT, unless it is clear from the context, possessive modifiers are used with *gyne* and *aner* to specify the meanings “wife” and “husband.” See Titus 3:5; 1 Cor 7:2; 14:35; Eph 5:22. But here no such modifiers are used.)

Another main contextual consideration confirms this conclusion, and that is the general context of the entire epistle. In 3:15 Paul informs Timothy that he is writing this letter “so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” In other words, he states specifically that his

intention is to discuss *church* life, not home life. The fact that the instruction concerning women and men in 2:8–15 is followed immediately by instruction concerning church offices is indicative of this more general focus of the entire letter.

“**To teach**” (*didaskain*). The word “teach,” from the Greek *didasko*, is in contrast with “receive instruction” in verse 11. It is best to understand the word “a man” to be the common object of both verbs, “teach” and “exercise authority over.” Thus “I do not allow a woman to teach a man” is a complete thought that is separate from “I do not allow a woman to exercise authority over a man,” as shown below.

What exactly is meant by “teach”? Rengstorf (135) says the Greeks used this word to mean “teaching” or “instructing” in the widest sense, including the imparting of information, the passing on of knowledge, and the acquiring of skills. There is also a nuance of authority, in the sense that the teacher is telling his students what they *ought* to believe or *ought* to do. This is quite different from other kinds of verbal presentations, such as personal testimonies and reports from mission fields.

Since 1 Tim 3:15 specifies that Paul is giving instructions about church life, we conclude that this prohibition applies only within the context of the church. Paul thus forbids women to teach *Christian* men in all functions of the church sanctioned by the elders, including but not limited to public worship. He is not forbidding such things as Christian mothers teaching their sons, or Christian women school teachers having male pupils. Since church life is in view, we also conclude that the prohibition is limited to teaching *Christian doctrine*, or teaching about the meaning and application of the Bible. That is, Paul is forbidding women to give authoritative instruction concerning biblical doctrine to Christian men in any kind of church function.

What about the common egalitarian contention that the teaching Paul is forbidding here is *false* teaching only? There is nothing at all in this verse or in this word to suggest that this is what Paul had in mind. Also, such an idea raises some obvious questions. If Paul’s main concern here is *false* teaching, why does he limit his prohibition only to women teaching *men*? It is just as wrong to teach false doctrine to women as to men. Also, if the main concern is false teaching, why does he prohibit only *women* from such teaching? It is just as wrong for men to teach false doctrine as for women to do it.

Thus this prohibition has nothing to do with whether the content of the

teaching is true or false. Paul forbids a woman to teach a man (as defined above), period.

**“To exercise authority over” (*authentein*).** The meaning of *authenteo* (used only here in the NT) is very controversial. One idea prevalent among egalitarians is that this word in itself has a negative connotation, i.e., that it refers to a kind of authority which in itself is sinful or wrongly seized. This view is perpetuated in some translations, including the KJV, which says “usurp authority.” Other versions use the word “domineer” (Berkeley, Williams, NEB), a practice that of course is objectionable by definition. As one egalitarian says, it means to seize autocratic, dictatorial control (Webb, 2:7).

This conclusion is drawn mainly from one of the meanings of the related noun, *authentēs*, which in ancient Greece was sometimes applied to individuals in the negative senses of “autocrat” and even “murderer.” Thus, it is concluded, if an *authentēs* is “a murderer,” then the verb *authenteo* must mean “to commit murder,” or at least to exercise violent and dictatorial control over someone. Thus Paul is forbidding women to exercise absolute power over men in a destructive manner; he is not forbidding the exercise of ordinary authority over men.

Others, however, have concluded that the verb *authenteo* does not have this negative connotation, but simply means “exercise authority over” (NASB, ESV) or “have authority over” (NKJV, NRSV, NIV), as most translations render it. In other words, it is not a kind of authority that is objectionable in itself, nor is it necessarily seized (“usurped”) in an unlawful manner.

One way to decide the meaning of this word is to examine all the times *authenteo* was used in Greek literature of any kind near the time of the NT. This has been done H. Scott Baldwin. He has identified, examined, listed, and analyzed all the 82 relevant uses of this verb from the first century B.C. to the twelfth century A.D. (see Baldwin, “Word” and “*authenteo*”). He concludes that in every case but two, *authenteo* was used to mean legitimate authority without any kind of destructive connotation such as “domineer.” The two exceptions are one use by Chrysostom in A.D. 390, where it means something akin to “usurp authority.” The other negative sense comes from the tenth century A.D., where it was used in the sense of “murder.” But these examples are too late to help us understand what the word meant closer to the

first century. The fact is that every known use of the word in NT times and for several hundred years thereafter refers not to sinful authority but to a valid, positive kind of authority.

If *authenteo* in itself meant a sinful kind of authority, why would Paul again limit his prohibition to women? It would be just as wrong for men to usurp such authority as it is for women. Also, if this were the meaning, why does Paul forbid such domineering only over *men*? Would it not be wrong to domineer over women also?

The only sound conclusion is that Paul is prohibiting women in the church to hold positions of authority over men. The apostleship was such a position; this is a reason why no woman was chosen to the office of apostle. The eldership is such a position; thus 1 Tim 2:12 prohibits women from serving as elders in the church.

“**Or**” (*oude*). This simple conjunction linking “teach” and “exercise authority” may seem insignificant, but in fact it is very important for our understanding of the verse as a whole. This is so because some think *oude* links these two verbs together in such a way that they represent just one activity, not two. The idea is that Paul is saying that it is wrong for a woman to teach men *in such a way* that she usurps authority over them. That is, as long as she is not usurping authority, it is all right for her to teach men. Thus if the elders sanction it, a woman can legitimately teach a mixed adult Bible class or even preach from the pulpit.

This view assumes two things. First, it assumes that the word *authenteo* means “usurp authority,” which we have already seen is entirely false. Second, it assumes that the very force of the word *oude* is to link two actions together in such a way that they are inseparable, or in such a way that the one defines the other. One egalitarian has said that its English equivalent is ‘n’, as in such familiar phrases as “nice ‘n’ easy,” “hot ‘n’ bothered,” “eat ‘n’ run.” Thus what Paul is saying is that a woman must not “teach ‘n’ domineer” over a man, i.e., she must not teach men in a domineering manner.

Is this the proper meaning of *oude*? The answer is no. Köstenberger’s study of *oude* (“Sentence”) shows that it never connects a positive activity with a negative activity, but always connects either two positive activities or two negative ones. This in itself rules out the suggestion that the two verbs, *didasko* and *authenteo*, form a single idea meaning “teach (positive) so as to usurp authority (negative).” Also, though this conjunction does connect two

things or activities that are related, they always remain distinct. It is usually like our combination “neither ... nor,” and sometimes it is equivalent to “not even.” Its precise force in 1 Tim 2:12 is probably this: “I permit a woman *neither* to teach a man, *nor* to have authority over a man.”

“***But to remain quiet***” (*all’ einai en hesuchia*). *Hesuchia* does not mean “be silent” (as the NIV translates it), but to have a quiet demeanor or attitude. Apparently this was an important point for Paul, because he gives the same instruction in verse 11, “Let a woman *quietly* receive instruction.” Thus Paul opens and closes this two-verse instruction to women with an emphasis on a quiet spirit. This suggests that the Ephesian women did have a problem that Paul is addressing here, namely, that they were dutifully learning Christian doctrine but were not doing so in quietness and submission (v. 11). Rather, they were seeking to use their knowledge in an improper way, i.e., in teaching and having authority over men. This would explain Paul’s emphasis on a quiet, submissive attitude.

### 3. Practical Applications

How may these conclusions be applied to questions of church leadership today? In my judgment, only two kinds of church activities are prohibited for Christian women by 1 Tim 2:12. The first is *teaching Christian men*, as defined above. Two notes may be added here. One, this verse does not prohibit women from teaching *non-Christian* men, e.g., in an evangelistic situation (see below). Two, exactly when a boy becomes a man is something we may never agree upon. Each body of elders should set a policy on this for their own congregations, without condemning those who disagree. The bottom line is that women are not allowed to teach in any Christian-to-Christian situation where men are in the audience. This applies especially to preaching from the pulpit, and teaching mixed adult Sunday school classes.

The second prohibited activity is *exercising authority over Christian men*. This means that women may not be elders, since this is an office of general authority in the church. This also shows why Jesus chose no women to be apostles.

It should be emphasized that the category of things *not* prohibited by 1 Tim 2:12 is ***much*** larger than the former. First, this text does not prohibit women from teaching in church contexts where no men are present. That is, they may teach other women (Titus 2:3–5), as well as children of both sexes. If a woman has a gift of teaching and there is not a proper context for the use

of her gift, a congregation should seriously consider dividing Bible classes according to gender, thus creating more women's classes.

Second, this text does not prohibit women from witnessing to unbelievers, men or women. Unbelievers are not a part of the "household of God" (1 Tim 3:15) and thus are not excluded by the prohibition. This means that women may participate fully in evangelism and missionary work. In Acts 18:26 Priscilla's "teaching" of Apollos was in fact witnessing to an unbeliever (Apollos had not been baptized into Christ, Acts 18:25; see 19:1–7).

Third, this text does not prohibit women from participating in a worship service, as long as they are not teaching men or exercising authority over men. "Leading" singing is not exercising authority. Giving inspirational testimony is not teaching. Communion meditations, on the other hand, are usually a form of teaching.

Fourth, this text does not prohibit women from being involved in many positions of leadership or administration in the church, where these do not involve teaching men and having authority over men. We should make a distinction between having authority over *people*, and administering *programs* or having responsibility over certain areas of service in the church.

Whether women can be deacons or not cannot be settled by this text. Biblically understood, the office of deacon does not involve teaching men or having authority over men; thus 1 Tim 2:12 does not apply. But a study of other texts suggests that there is no biblical precedent for women as deacons. In Rom 16:1 the use of *diakonos* for Phoebe is best understood in the generic sense of "servant" (see Cottrell, *Romans*, 2:461–464). In Acts 6:1–6 when the apostles gave instructions for choosing the seven protodeacons, they commanded that "seven men" be selected. The word for "men" is *aner*, which specifically means "males."

Does 1 Tim 3:11 refer to deaconesses, as Thatcher (65–66) believes? The question arises in view of the fact that this verse, which appears in the middle of Paul's list of qualifications for deacons (vv. 8,12), refers to *gynaikas* (plural for *gyne*), which can mean either "wives" or "women." Many take this to mean the deacons' wives; others see it as referring to women leaders, if not deacons as such then something equivalent to deacons. The latter is a possibility, but several considerations rule out including the *gynaikas* in the general category of deacons. These are as follows.

(1) The use of the word "likewise" (*hosautos*) in 1 Tim 3:8 and 3:11. In

3:8 this word introduces the deacons as a group different from the elders. Its use in 3:11 suggests that it is here introducing yet another group distinct from the deacons. (This is how the word functions in 1 Tim 2:8–9 and Titus 2:2–6.)

(2) The use of the words *semnotes* and *semnos* in this chapter. *Semnotes* is a noun meaning “gravity, dignity” and is used in 1 Tim 3:4 as a qualification for elders. *Semnos* is the equivalent adjective, meaning “grave, dignified, worthy of respect.” It is used in 3:8 as the first qualification for deacons, and is also used in 3:11 as the first qualification for the *gynaikas*. If 3:11 is giving further qualifications for women deacons, why is this adjective (*semnos*) repeated from 3:8? The fact that it and its related noun are used three times in these lists suggests that we have three groups here: elders, deacons, and *gynaikas*.

(3) The use of “deacons” in both 3:8 and 3:12 and *gynaikas* (“women, wives”) in 3:11 pointedly distinguishes these women from the category of deacons.

(4) Those who hold that 3:11 refers specifically to women deacons usually say that 3:12 then refers specifically to men deacons. If this were the case, we would expect the word “men” in 3:12 instead of the word “deacons.”

(5) If 3:12 states qualifications for men deacons only, then it is required of both elders (3:2) and men deacons that they be “the husband of one wife.” Why would it not be equally important that the women deacons be “the wife of one husband”? Even widows who wanted church support had to meet this requirement (1 Tim 5:9). Yet it is not given as a requirement for the *gynaikas* in 3:11. This implies that the *gynaikas* are not women deacons.

(6) The use of the Greek word *gyne* (singular for *gynaikas*) in the sense of “wives” in 3:2 and 3:12 suggests that this is its meaning in 3:11 also. The reason there is no possessive (“their”) in 3:11 may be that in this verse *gynaikas* includes both the wives of the elders and the wives of the deacons.