

“Women in Ministry”

The Father's House position paper on the ordination of women

I. Introduction

There are several controversial subjects that give rise to debate within the Body of Christ: speaking in tongues, the interpretation of “end time” prophecy, questions regarding eternal security vs. apostasy, just to name a few. One of the top ten debatable issues today is the subject of women in ministry. As a church we have always attempted to base our beliefs and practices on a sound Biblical interpretation, to “rightly divide the Word of God” regarding every issue, seeking to be culturally relevant without compromising the integrity or intent of Scripture. We will continue to re-evaluate our positions in the light of Scripture, with the input of other teachers and scholars whom the Lord brings within our sphere of influence.

In the following paper we will establish our convictions regarding the release of women into leadership ministry at the Father’s House. Since the beginning of our church we have received women pastors, prophets, missionaries, teachers, and evangelists to preach and teach at our meetings and events. What we have not clearly delineated is the biblical legitimacy of women in ministry, in regards to what they can or cannot do within the authority structure of The Father’s House and the growing network of churches whom we influence. Although the nature of our relationship with affiliated churches allows them freedom to develop their own practices, we are clarifying and publishing our position for those who will look to us as an example to pattern their ministries after.

Our goal is in no way to cause division or to alienate people from this fellowship who have a different opinion. Hopefully those who are of a different theological persuasion realize that we do not have to agree on every point of doctrine in order to walk in unity. Unity is a heart issue, a fellowship that comes from our union “in Christ”, and in agreement regarding the clearly stated “non-negotiable” articles of the faith. Our desire is not to alienate but rather to include and release everyone whom God has called and anointed. It is with that heart and desire that we have written this paper.

We have not come to these conclusions quickly or lightly. The following paper is the result of years of prayer, biblical research, lengthy discussion and observation of established and respected ministries. Our position and conclusions are the united thoughts and voice of our pastors, elders and resident Bible teachers. We are in agreement, and are convinced, that we are going forward with the favor of God and in alignment with His Word as we establish our position and release women to greater levels of ministry.

Sincerely In Christ,



Pastor Dave and the leadership team of TFH

II. The Significance of Women In Scripture

Creation

When Jesus was asked by the Pharisees whether or not it was lawful to divorce, He did not debate the meaning of the text on divorce in Deuteronomy, but appealed to creation and God's purpose in creating: "In the beginning it was not so." In this way He established an important principle: to understand how God intends human life to be, we should look to God's purpose in creating the human race. It should be noted that no other part of God's creation was created in His image; consequently, no part of His creation was capable of having fellowship with God. Therefore, God created *mankind* in His image, so that man could have relationship with God.

In Genesis, we find the most helpful perspective for understanding the significance of women. The first reference to *woman* in Scripture is found in Genesis 1:26-28 where the creation of man is first described:

Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

In this passage the word for *man* in Hebrew is "Adam", which means human (mankind), man as species rather than man as gender. The image of God in the creation of mankind was expressed through both genders, male and female. This passage in Genesis speaks of *authority* being released to both sexes, *to rule over* and *subdue*. God released His authority to mankind to have dominion over the rest of His creation. Note that God, when describing man's purpose in taking dominion over the earth, uses the pronoun *them* to include both genders. It is not the male alone who is to rule over creation, but both male and female. Also, both genders together are an expression of God's image and likeness. This idea is also found in the second account of the human creation, where the man's and the woman's creation are separately described:

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

Does "suitable helper" imply that the woman was made as a servant to the man? No, the Hebrew word *helper* is more commonly used for God as a helper of humans (e.g., Exodus 18:4)—the word does not presume lesser authority. The word *suitable* in Hebrew is a compound preposition, literally 'like-opposite', and is found only here in the Old Testament. This word seems to express both similarity and difference. If only similarity were meant, the more natural phrase would be 'like him.' So the Hebrew word *suitable* implies both a similarity and a distinction between man and woman. She is a helper who both corresponds to him (similar), and complements him (different). The woman was created to be a companion and a partner in fulfilling the purpose for which man was created.

*Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said,
“This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called ‘woman,’
for she was taken out of man.” Genesis 2:22-23*

It is deeply significant that this wonderful new creature is taken from his side; not from his head, his hips, or his feet, but from the side where his heart is. She is, in the deepest sense of the word, his partner, being “part” of him. This story illustrates the equality of man and woman, in that they share the same nature and standing with God.

The release of authority in both genders is clearly taught in these seminal passages, yet there is also a clear differentiation of roles. The man is described as the leader in the relationship by virtue of his being created first (1 Timothy 2:12-13; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9), and by the act of his bestowing a name on the woman. What we learn concerning the subordination of the woman to her husband in Genesis is pertinent to the relationship of a man and woman in marriage; the husband is to be the head of the wife and the leader of the home.

This doctrine is clearly substantiated in the New Testament. What is not as clear is whether these passages should be extended beyond the husband-wife relationship. Should we conclude from Eve’s subordination to her husband, the general subordination of women to men, and the resulting inappropriateness of women in leadership positions outside the home, whether it be in the workplace, in the church, or in government? It is our belief that such a generalization is unwarranted. It is not hermeneutically sound to draw conclusions concerning the roles of women in general based upon the dynamics of marriage as defined in the marital relationship of Adam and Eve.

Women Leaders in the Old Testament

During the Old Testament era, God raised up both men and women in critical times to fulfill critical functions of leadership. One noteworthy example is Deborah, the judge and prophetess found in the Book of Judges. A judge in those days, prior to the monarchy, was the most powerful political position in the land. A judge was a combination of a Supreme Court justice and a president, deciding court cases and functioning as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Much like our current culture in America, the Jewish culture of that time was clearly a patriarchal society—tribes.

A careful reading of the book of Judges shows the office of judge was filled by divine appointment, and of all these divinely appointed rulers only Deborah and Samuel were appointed by God to be both judge and prophet. In Judges chapter 4 we read that when Israel was oppressed by King Jabin of Hazor, Deborah summoned Barak, the military leader of Israel, and gave him the command of the Lord to gather the troops and advance against the enemy. Barak insisted Deborah accompany him. Deborah, functioning as a prophetess, heard the voice of the Lord telling her that God would go before the army of Israel and lead them to victory. And it was Deborah, functioning as judge, who told Barak to command the army to go forth into battle. Notice how God released His authority to Deborah (a woman), who in turn released authority to Barak (a man) to lead the armies of Israel to victory.

What should be learned from this passage of Scripture is not that God was forced to raise up a woman because there was no man fit for the job. On the contrary, God is free to raise up into leadership any person, regardless of gender, who is truly committed and yielded to Him, even when it breaks cultural norms. The argument that God chose Deborah because there was not a suitable man in all of Israel is not substantiated by the text.

Huldah was a famous prophetess in the reign of Josiah who gave instructions to the entire nation of Judah (2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22). It was most certainly not for lack of godly male leadership. She was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zephaniah, who were both residents of Jerusalem along with her. When the Book of the Law was discovered and read to the king, he was greatly distressed for fear of God's judgment on the nation for their decadence, and called on the high priest to "Go and inquire of the LORD for me." The high priest's response was to seek out Huldah. Huldah spoke the prophetic word of the Lord to the very highest authorities in the land, the high priest and the king, instructing them in the will of God.

It is worth noting that there is clearly no indication of a lack of qualified men in these examples; consequently, the argument that God will raise up a woman only when there is a lack of qualified men is invalidated by the examples of Deborah and Huldah.

Women in the Life and Ministry of Jesus

Jesus ministered to women of all backgrounds, and although there is no direct reference to women being included as disciples, the evidence is clear that Jesus never excluded women despite the patriarchal norms of the day. The Gospels are full of references to women who were directly involved in the support of Jesus' ministry. Mention is made of Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, Joanna, Susanna, as well as Mary and Martha of Bethany. Some of these women traveled with Him and supported His ministry.

And the twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance. Luke 8:1-3

These were the women who supported Jesus in His suffering, following Him to the Cross, and even being chosen by God to see the empty tomb first (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49; Luke 23:55). Although these examples do not directly support the ordination of women, they do show the significance of women in the ministry of Jesus. Even in our current society, there is a degree of gender bias against women. How much more were women restrained from fulfilling the call on their lives in the time of Jesus' ministry on earth? Our Lord broke down barriers that had been instituted by man.

▪ Equal Status before God

Picture the expression on the religious leaders' faces as they watched a woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery being forgiven of her sin, then a short time later given access to the Son of God, as she was allowed into the home of a Jewish religious leader. Not only was access granted, she actually ministered to Jesus by washing His feet with her tears and hair. This example is a physical representation of equal standing before God, which was later reaffirmed by Paul in his letter to the church in Galatia.

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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. Galatians 3:25-28

This verse is often misunderstood. Paul was not making a statement about social roles. He was not saying that there were to be no gender distinctions in the church, any more than he was declaring the emancipation of Christian slaves. What he was saying is that *in Christ*, in our relationship to God through Christ, there is no *discrimination*, no *caste system*. This verse by itself does not establish the legitimacy of women in ministry, but it emphasizes the equality of women with men before God, and would rule out any notion that women are not qualified to lead through any inherent inferiority.

III. The Ordination of Women in Ministry

The Debate Regarding Women in Ministry

As we have seen, the equality of the genders and their sharing in the work of God's kingdom can be readily established from Scripture. A more controversial subject is the debate regarding women in ministry. The ordination of women is a controversial issue for different reasons among different Christian sects. For Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Greek or Russian Orthodox Christians, ordination is the conferring of holy orders, by which one is inducted into priesthood. This priesthood, patterned after the Aaronic priesthood in the Old Testament, is, by definition, limited to men. For Protestants, ordination is understood more generally as the acceptance of an individual for pastoral work. Most Protestant denominations ordain women for pastoral ministries, except for some of the conservative denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention (only recently, in 2000, they passed a rule to prevent women from serving as pastor), Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, and some non-denominational fundamentalist groups. Many other conservative denominations, such as the American Baptists, the Church Of Christ, and the Nazarenes, ordain women. Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and the Church of God, have been ordaining women since their beginnings.

For Protestants the debate over women's eligibility for such offices normally centers around interpretation of certain Biblical passages relating to teaching and leadership roles. This is because Protestant churches view the Bible as the primary authority in church debates, even over established traditions. Therefore, perhaps the best place to start in examining this issue is to look at the Biblical arguments which are used to exclude women from ordination.

Scriptural Arguments for the Exclusion of Women from Ordination

- **“Women Are Not Permitted to Teach or Exercise Authority Over Men”**

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. 1 Timothy 2:11-15

This is perhaps the most important passage to address when discussing the topic of women in ministry. It is the classical passage most often quoted to exclude women from preaching or teaching in a congregation where men are present. The traditional understanding of this verse is that women can teach children, or other women, but to teach in a gender-mixed group would be to overstep their roles since teaching men is a form of exercising authority over them, a role reversal, and a violation of God's order. Is this the proper understanding of this verse, or are there other possible interpretations?

The answer to that question lies in the answer to this one: Is Paul addressing his instruction to women in relation to the church, or women in relation to their husbands? If Paul is speaking about women in relation to the church, then the traditional interpretation of this verse is undeniable. If, however, he is speaking of women in relation to their husbands, then this verse should not be used to restrict women from teaching in the church.

Obviously, a case can be made for either interpretation, but there are several clues which support the latter. First, Paul switches from the plural *women* in the previous verse ("I also want women to dress modestly") to the singular *woman* in verse 11 ("A woman should learn in quietness and full submission"). This shift from the plural to the singular could indicate a subtle shift from women in general to a woman in specific circumstances. The Greek word *gunā* found in verse 11 can be translated "woman" or "wife", just as the word *aner* in verse 12 can be translated "man" or "husband". When the two words are found together in their singular form, as they are here, *aner* and *gunā* almost always refer to a husband and wife. (See **Appendix B -- On The Use of the Greek Words For "Man" and "Woman"**.) In light of this evidence, it is very likely that the words *man* and *woman* in verse 12 refer to husband and wife.

*Consider also the use of the word submission in verse 11 ("A woman should learn in quietness and full submission."). Whenever the New Testament writers wrote of the idea of submission in reference to women it was always with respect to their own husbands and not submission to men in general (1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-24, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1). If the idea of submission of the woman is limited to the husband, as is taught throughout the New Testament (in Colossians 3:18 Paul specifically says to wives, "submit yourselves to **your own** husbands"), then the prohibition against teaching, mentioned in the same verse, should also be so limited.*

This interpretation is confirmed in verses 13 and 14 where Paul argues his point by appealing to the example of Adam and Eve, the first married couple. Paul, in arguing that Adam was created first, and that "the woman" (Eve) was deceived rather than Adam, was making a case for the headship of the husband over the wife.

Finally, in verse 15, there is the odd verse about women being saved through childbearing. The true meaning of this text lies outside the scope of this paper, but clearly the reference to childbearing tells us one thing: Paul is speaking of women as wives; he is addressing his instruction to women not in relation to the church, but in relation to their husbands.

Bearing all these things in mind, the following translation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is perfectly plausible, and in many ways more cohesive and consistent with Pauline theology:

"A wife should learn in quietness and full submission (to her husband). I do not permit a wife to teach or to have authority over her husband; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was

deceived and became a sinner. But wives will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

The picture that emerges, then, is a prohibition against wives instructing and dictating to their husbands in a manner that would undermine the authority of the husband. Such a troublesome wife “must be silent”; in modern slang she should “put a lid on it”. This passage, when analyzed in light of Genesis chapters 1-3 (where God gives authority to both man and woman over all of creation, but then tells Eve she will desire the authority of her husband, yet she will have to submit to him) and Judges 4 (where Deborah was both prophetess and judge of Israel, yet God chose to point out the fact she was “the wife of Lapidoth”), gives us a portrait of a woman’s responsibility in the marital relationship; however, it is obvious that responsibility does not carry over to a woman’s responsibility to every male in the church.

Finally, since Paul is dealing in his Pastoral letters with heretical or destructive teaching, he may not be making a general rule to all the churches for all times, but a special rule for special circumstances. (See **Appendix C - Another View of 1 Timothy 2:11-15.**)

▪ **“Women Should Only Teach Women”**

But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine. Bid the older men to be temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited. Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves. Titus 2:1-6

Here in this pastoral letter from Paul to Titus, we read that the older women are expected to teach the younger women, to help train them to be the kind of women the Lord wants them to be. The passage suggests that the male leaders should avoid caring for younger women. Such direction is likely given in order to avoid sexual temptations and inappropriate personal attachments. Furthermore, there is undoubtedly an understanding in Titus 2 that women are best able to teach other women how to be mature Christian women. It is clear, then, that women taught other women how to live the Christian life. This teaching must have played an important part in the effective formation of Christian women then, as it most certainly does today. More mature women are uniquely qualified to teach younger women. However, this passage does not refer to women *only* teaching women; therefore, one should not infer that from this portion of Scripture.

▪ **“The Doctrine of Headship of Man Over Woman”**

There are many Scriptures which speak of the authority of “man” over the “woman”, beginning in Genesis, and continuing throughout the New Testament. Genesis 2:7 teaches that man was made first, and Paul uses this verse to support the notion that the man holds headship over the woman (1 Timothy 2:13). Genesis 2:18-24 says that the woman was made to be the man’s companion and helper. Both Paul and Peter teach that the wife is to submit to the husband (Ephesians 5:22-24, 33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1). This notion of the headship of man is regarded by some as an argument against women in authority over men, and therefore precluding the ordination of women. However, in all of these passages, one can argue that the context is a husband and wife relationship, Adam and Eve being the archetypal marriage.

Those who oppose the ordination of women (complementarians) often assume that those who are not opposed to the ordination of women (egalitarians) have “feminist” inclinations. We want to

emphasize that we oppose the feminist philosophy, and the agenda which it promotes, especially the obliteration of gender role distinctions and the rejection of the biblical doctrine of wives being in subjection to their husbands. We affirm the doctrine of the headship of husbands over wives, and the distinction of gender roles between men and women.

▪ **“Women Should Not Speak In the Church”**

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Some take this passage to mean that women should not be allowed to speak in the congregation, but such an interpretation is problematic for several reasons. First of all, such an interpretation would flatly contradict Paul’s instruction in chapter 11, verse 5: “*every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.*” Since he instructs women how to pray and prophesy, he cannot mean here that women are not to speak at all. Secondly, it is clear from the context that Paul is dealing with issues of disorderly conduct in the congregation. In the previous verse (33a), Paul concludes his instructions on prophecy, and introduces this instruction with the adage: “God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.” He continues this theme of disorderly conduct in verses 34 and 35.

Paul was not forbidding women from praying, prophesying, or otherwise formally addressing the congregation. Rather, he was instructing the women not to talk among themselves during the meetings and so disrupt the service, but to wait in quietness and discuss things with their husbands privately at home. This interpretation is strengthened by the verse which precedes it: “God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.” (For more discussion on this verse see **Appendix D - An Analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.**)

The word that is translated “speak” in verse 34a (“They are not allowed to speak”) is *laleō*, which is by no means reserved for the idea of formal speech, but usually means “to talk or converse”, and is translated “talk” or “say” over 80 times in the NIV. Indeed, the primary classical meaning of this word is “to prattle, to talk childishly” (Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the NT). In addition, the present tense used here should be translated “to keep talking”. This more careful rendering of the verb eliminates any perceived contradiction with verse 11:5, and clarifies the problem that Paul was addressing—women talking to one another during the service, when they should have been listening.

This interpretation is further strengthened by verse 35: “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.” In New Testament times, the congregations were segregated, with men in front and women in back, in keeping with synagogue tradition. The reference to “inquiring” would indicate that women were engaged in discussions with one another during the service about what was being taught.

Clearly then, Paul was not forbidding women from praying, prophesying, or otherwise formally addressing the congregation. Rather, he was instructing the women not to talk among themselves during the meetings and so disrupt the service, but to wait in quietness and discuss things with their husbands privately at home. This interpretation is in perfect harmony with verse 33a which precedes it: “God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.”

▪ Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, we conclude there is insufficient theological ground for excluding women from ordination. Although there are no indisputable scriptural examples of women being ordained as pastors in the church, one cannot establish a prohibition based on something that is not mentioned in Scripture, and there are many passages of Scripture which support the idea, as we will demonstrate in the next section.

Scriptures Used to Support Women in Ministry

The primary point we are addressing isn't so much the basis for women in ministry, as it is *authority*. Our opinion is that a scholar of the scriptures would be violating basic principles of Bible interpretation if they hold a position that disallows women from holding positions of authority. Let us explain in further detail.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1:27-28

The Hebrew word for "dominion" in this passage is *radah* which means "to tread down as winepress with the feet, to subjugate, to crumble, to subdue. To rule, to sway, to have dominion, to prevail against, to reign." (Dictionary of NT Words, *Zodhiates*) It should be noted that God said "to *them*" (inference made to both male and female). So God gave authority to both men and women to rule over His creation.

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Genesis 3:16

When Adam and Eve fell to temptation, God imposed consequences for their actions. One of the consequences handed down to Eve (and every woman after her) is that she would desire to lord over her husband, yet he would rule over her. The inferred equality Adam and Eve shared prior to falling to temptation was removed, and God gave authority in the marital relationship to the man. However, this passage makes no reference to a woman being commanded to submit to other men; therefore, it is poor Bible interpretation to deduce that God was stating every woman would submit to every man as a consequence of the Fall.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. Judges 4:4

The entire fourth chapter of Judges is worthy of close examination regarding God choosing Deborah to lead the nation of Israel and anointing her as a prophetess; however, the fourth verse of this chapter is particularly noteworthy in that God chose to point out the specific roles Deborah fulfilled. She was:

1. a prophetess
2. the wife of Lapidoth
3. a judge

Deborah's role as a spiritual leader, and THE governmental leader of Israel, did not negate her responsibility as wife to Lapidoth, nor did her role as a wife disqualify her to lead the nation of

Israel. The fact that God never took authority away from women (He redefined the role in the context of the marital relationship) is personified in this verse.

The above passages demonstrate that God never subjugated women to second-class status, to live lives of simple obedience to men. In fact, we have already pointed out the New Testament references to God seeing no distinction between men and women in Christ; however, this lack of distinction does not eliminate role distinctions and our individual responsibilities to submit to those roles. Yet, despite role distinction, we see in both the Old Testament and the New Testament that God gives authority and gifts to both genders.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 1 Peter 2:9

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Revelation 1:5-6

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." Revelation 5:9-10

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:4-8

Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28

The above scripture references are noteworthy in that there is no gender distinction in the original Greek language; therefore, both men and women:

1. are a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...
2. are part of His own special people
3. are made kings and priests unto our God
4. are given gifts to serve the Body

From the very beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit is poured out on men and women alike. Both men and women are added to the Christian people, undergo persecution, endure suffering for the sake of the Lord, bring others to faith in Jesus, and build up the body of Christians. This pattern, seen in the earliest Christian community, continues through the following centuries in the church of the Fathers. Both men and women participate in the life of the Christian people and in taking responsibility for the Body.

New Testament Examples of Women Serving in Leadership Positions

▪ Prophecy

Both men and women prophesied among the early Christians. The Acts of the Apostles mentions the daughters of Philip in this role: “*And he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied*” (Acts 21:9). In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul recognizes the presence of women who prophesied regularly in the worship services of the Christian community:

Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head. 1 Corinthians 11:5

The view that women prophesied regularly in the early church is confirmed by the account of the events on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the followers of Jesus, which included both men and women. In explaining the event, Peter quotes a prophecy from Joel about the outpouring of the Spirit upon all of God's people. He quoted the following lines from the prophecy:

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

It is quite possible Peter used this prophecy in part because the group of onlookers saw women as well as men prophesying (Acts 1:14; 2:1-4). In any case, he did use the prophecy from Joel to explain what would happen when the Spirit was given, and that prophecy clearly speaks of women as being equipped to prophesy. The view that women prophesied among the early Christians is consistent with the Old Testament practice. Many women prophesied in the prophetic age of Israel; their gift was often significant for the development of the people. Deborah and Huldah are the most outstanding examples, but not the only ones. The early Christians, following Joel, would have expected the gift of prophecy to be given to Christians more widely, not more narrowly, than in the Old Testament.

Another question about women prophesying in the church concerns an interpretation of scripture that equates prophecy with preaching. Clearly prophecy and preaching are similar in function, since they both involve instruction, exhortation and encouragement through the Word of God (1 Corinthians 14:3). There are some scriptural grounds for seeing prophecy as what we would now call "preaching." The best evidence is from Acts 15:32 which shows a connection between the role of prophet and a kind of exhortation. If Paul really meant that women were not supposed to teach men, as some interpret 1 Timothy 2:11-15, it is doubtful that he would have permitted women prophets in the church.

Did women hold the office of prophetess among the early Christians? The New Testament recognizes prophets as holding some kind of position in the community (see 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 3:5 and Acts 13:1, among others). There even seems to have been some distinction between people who prophesy (there are indications that almost any Christian might prophesy on occasion) and those who hold the position of prophet. We know of men who were called prophets. We do not know of any women who held this title or were described in this way. The Acts of the Apostles only says of the daughters of Philip that “they prophesied.” Such phrasing might indicate that these women had a strong gift of prophecy, but that women did not hold a position of prophetess in the early church. However, the fact that women were recognized as

prophetesses in the Old Testament might suggest that Christian women held this position as well. Since the distinction between prophesying and holding the position of a prophet(ess) is not clearly drawn and elaborated in the New Testament, and since the specific references to women prophesying are so few, no definitive conclusions can be drawn. However, in his *History of the Church*, Eusebius quotes an unknown, second-century author who listed Philip's daughters among "the prophets of the New Covenant".

▪ Teaching

Many hold a woman's participation in teaching activities is simply prohibited by 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:12. However, these prohibitions probably referred to something very specific, as has already been shown. The following are some New Testament references to women teaching.

Acts 18:24-28 describes a woman teaching in the course of missionary work. In this passage Apollos, a recent convert, is speaking about Jesus in the Ephesian synagogue. Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's co-workers, see him, and "when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately." Some significance may or may not lie in the fact that Priscilla's name comes first in this particular passage and in 18:18. There is likely significance in the fact that Apollos was taken into their home before Priscilla instructed him. The passage indicates clearly that she worked with Aquila to instruct Apollos. The instruction must have proceeded at a fairly high spiritual and intellectual level, because Apollos was a learned man and he went on to continue teaching afterwards. Therefore, Priscilla must have been well-educated as a Christian and capable of a high level of instruction. She is mentioned by Paul in Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and 2 Timothy 4:19. She and her husband labored together with Paul in the work of evangelism, the only husband and wife team mentioned in all of the New Testament. Priscilla's name is frequently mentioned before her husband's, which is very unusual for those times, and is a possible indication of her prominence. She was likely the chief woman worker in Paul's band, and perhaps possessed a prominence in the whole work that was greater than her husband's. Paul seems to have relied heavily on the two of them, and they were important in instructing Apollos, who became an important missionary worker.

The letters of Paul offer fascinating information about many Jewish and Gentile women who were prominent in the early church. He greets Prisca (Priscilla), Junia, Julia, and Nereus' sister, who worked and traveled as missionaries in pairs with their husbands or brothers (Romans 16:3, 7, 15). He tells us that Prisca and her husband risked their lives to save his. He praises Junia as a prominent ambassador for Christ (Greek: *apostolos*), who had been imprisoned for her labor. Mary and Persis are commended for their hard work (Romans 16:6, 12). Euodia and Syntyche, both women, are called Paul's fellow-workers in the gospel who "labored side by side" with him (Philippians 4:2-3). Here is clear evidence of women who played key roles in the earliest work of spreading the Christian message.

In Colossians 4:15 we find this greeting from Paul: "Give my greetings...to Nympha and the church in her house." So long as one does not begin with a dogmatic assertion that women could not have been leaders or teachers of churches in the apostolic age (based on a narrow interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11), the plausible conclusion is that Paul is greeting Nympha as the leader of the group that meets in her house.

Also, the epistle of 2 John, addressed "to the elect Lady and her children". Clement of Alexandria (2nd Century A.D.) believed the epistle was written to a woman and the church

which met in her house. For Clement, at any rate, the notion of women as leaders in the apostolic church was plausible. (For a discussion of this, see **Appendix A – A Discussion of ‘The Elect Lady’ in 2 John.**)

▪ **Charitable Service**

Charitable service focuses on care for the needy—the poor, the sick, and travelers. Charitable service was a major activity among the early Christians and was perhaps the main form of Christian service. In an affluent society with an institutionalized welfare system, the significance of directly helping the needy is often overlooked as a form of Christian service. Yet descriptions of the life of the early church indicate that charitable service demanded more time and energy from the Christian people than anything else except raising families. As with prophecy and teaching, both men and women participated actively in charitable service.

The people who assumed a special responsibility for charitable service were the deacons and the widows (possibly deaconesses). The deacons were the men in the community who bore the active responsibility of caring for the needy. The deacons were responsible for many other matters as well, but the early church orders indicate that the care of widows and orphans was the most time-consuming of their responsibilities. The New Testament passages that speak about the activity of men in charitable service are likely speaking about deacons, when they are not referring to heads of households. In Acts 6, the “seven” are appointed to care for the daily distribution to the widows. The other indication we have of men doing charitable service is Romans 12:8, again a passage which likely refers to deacons.

Two passages, one in Acts and the other in the Pastoral Epistles, address the women's activity in charitable service. Acts contains the following description of Tabitha:

Now there was at Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which means Dorcas or Gazelle. She was full of good works and acts of charity. Acts 9:36

Her works of charity or mercy had something to do with making clothes for the poor (v. 39), and the way the other widows gathered around her (v. 39) indicates that she was probably one of the widows in the community.

The second passage occurs in 1 Timothy and concerns the enrollment of widows. Widows were a recognized group, or order, in the early church. The order of widows had some further functions in the life of the Christian community than just providing for needy widows. The description of the "true widow" in verse 5 makes it clear that a central part of the widow's activity was prayer and intercession. Post-New Testament descriptions of the order of widows in the early Christian community confirm that prayer and intercession was one of the main, if not *the* main, activity of the widow. In addition, the qualifications of a good candidate include a reputation for charitable work. Once more, the later descriptions of the order of widows confirm that widows were responsible for much charitable service to the needy.

The deacons and widows served the needy in different ways. Both men and women did charitable service, but their roles in this service differed. This role difference was analogous to the role difference in the family.

Romans 16:1-2, together with 1 Timothy 3:11, provides significant support for the view that the position of deaconess existed among Christians in New Testament times. The New Testament does not provide a clear picture of what deaconesses may have done.

Both men and women served the early Christian community through prophesying, teaching, and charitable service. The references in scripture to the activity of women in these services are few, but neither are there many references to the men serving in these ways. The New Testament simply does not describe in much detail the specific activities that strengthened the early Christian community. Scripture devotes more attention to the service of apostles and elders as Christian servants in the early community, but even in their case it says very little about the specific tasks of their service, how they spent a typical day, and what they did with the people they were responsible for. Even though the New Testament references are scanty, there is no reason to doubt that both men and women taught, prophesied, and did charitable service in the churches founded by Paul; nor is there any reason to doubt that the same was true for all the early Christian churches.

Tradition and Cultural Norms

The question of the legitimacy of ordaining women is a complex issue. But, as we see it, the burden of proof is on those who would forbid such a practice. And we find in Scripture no clear prohibition against it. To argue from the point of tradition will carry no weight for an evangelical Christian, since according to the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, all traditions and cultural norms must be continually re-evaluated according to Scripture. An important example is slavery. Paul ordered slaves to submit to their masters, but clearly this concession was not a divine sanction of slavery. As societies changed under the influence of the gospel it became increasingly clear that slavery was immoral. Perhaps there are some similarities here. In Biblical times, societies were very patriarchal, and women were much more limited in their roles. It is the gospel, and not feminism, which has been the chief influence in raising the respect and increasing the freedoms of women in society. The reluctance, over the ages, towards women in ministry, appears to be based more on tradition and the example of concessions to cultural norms in the Bible than to a clear moral principle in Scripture.

Conclusion

In light of all that has been discussed in the previous pages, the leadership of The Father's House has concluded that women should be released to, or restricted from, ministry based upon character, calling, gifting and measurable fruit, and not upon their gender. Although there remains several subjective discussions regarding the interpretation and application of scripture, it is our conclusion, based on the commands, the examples, and the principles given in the Bible, and in harmony with the ministry of Jesus, that women will be licensed and ordained as pastors in our church. This release of authority will only be released to those who have proven the call of God and the test of character before the leadership and congregation of the church. This "proving of ministry" must never be stricter, nor more lax, for a woman than for a man.

Appendix A - A Discussion of ‘The Elect Lady’ in 2 John

Many modern scholars believe the term “Elect Lady” – *eklectē kuria* (feminine form of *Kurios*—master, sir) is speaking metaphorically of a church. But other scholars have recognized that there is a strong possibility of an actual person being referenced. In Romans 16:13 Paul greets Rufus as “elect” – *eklectē*. The name *kuria* was a common name for women at that time. The form of the greeting, “the elder to the elect Kuria”, follows the form of the greeting in 3 John, “the elder to the beloved Gaius”. The reference to her children is taken by most to be referring to members of the community she leads, probably in her house (see v. 10). This parallels what we find in Colossians 4:15.

Appendix B --- On The Use of the Greek Words For “Man” and “Woman”

The Greek word for man (*aner*) and the Greek word for woman (*gunā*), when used together, in the singular form, are almost always referring to a husband and wife, and our English translations reflect this. These two words are found together, in their singular form, in the same sentence, 18 times in the New Testament. These verses are listed below, with the words translating *aner* and *gunā* italicized.

Matthew 19:10 The disciples said to Him, “If this is the situation between a *husband* and *wife*, it is better not to marry.”

Luke 16:18 “Anyone who divorces his *wife* and marries another *woman* commits adultery, and the *man* who marries a divorced *woman* commits adultery.”

1 Corinthians 7:2-4 But since there is so much immorality, each *man* should have his own *wife*, and each *woman* her own *husband*. The *husband* should fulfill his marital duty to his *wife*, and likewise the *wife* to her *husband*. The *wife*’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her *husband*. In the same way, the *husband*’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his *wife*.

1 Corinthians 7:10-16 A *wife* must not separate from her *husband*. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her *husband*. And a *husband* must not divorce his *wife*. If any brother has a *wife* who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a *woman* has a *husband* who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving *husband* has been sanctified through his *wife*, and the unbelieving *wife* has been sanctified through her believing *husband*. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing *man* or *woman* is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, *wife*, whether you will save your *husband*? Or, how do you know, *husband*, whether you will save your *wife*?

1 Corinthians 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every *man* is Christ, and the head of the *woman* is *man*

1 Corinthians 11:8-9, 11-12 For *man* did not come from *woman*, but *woman* from *man*; neither was *man* created for *woman*, but *woman* for *man*. In the Lord, however, *woman* is not independent of *man*, nor is *man* independent of *woman*. For as *woman* came from *man*, so also *man* is born of *woman*.

Ephesians 5:23-24 For the *husband* is the head of the *wife* as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also *wives* should submit to their *husbands* in everything.

Ephesians 5:33 However, each one of you also must love his *wife* as he loves himself, and the *wife* must respect her *husband*.

1 Timothy 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the *husband* of but one *wife*,

1 Timothy 3:12 A deacon must be the *husband* of but one *wife* and must manage his children and his household well.

Titus 1:6 An elder must be blameless, the *husband* of but one *wife*

In all of the above verses, with the possible exception of I Corinthians 11:3, the words *aner* and *gunā* refer to a husband-wife relationship. In I Corinthians 11:3, when Paul writes “the head of every man is Christ”, he is not referring to husbands only, but to every male believer. In this context, when he says “the head of the woman is the man”, it can be interpreted in one of two ways. Since he does not say “the head of every woman is the man” (that is, since he avoids using the word *every* which he uses in the previous clause), some would conclude that Paul is referring to the husband-wife relationship. Others stress that the expression “every man” in the previous clause sets the context beyond marriage, and therefore what follows applies to women in general. If this is the correct understanding, this is an important verse speaking of the need for a woman, whether she be a wife or not, to have a “male covering”. Assuming this to be the correct interpretation, one cannot conclude that the need for covering excludes the right to lead and instruct. The concept of “covering”, that is, of being under authority, applies to men as well. Therefore, this verse should not be taken to mean that a woman is excluded from leadership in the church.

Appendix C – Another View of I Timothy 2:11-15

The Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) show a particular concern with protecting the gospel from disrepute. This is the reason for the submission of wives (Titus 2:5) and slaves (Titus 2:10, 1 Timothy 6:1 and perhaps 5:14), and a consideration for choosing overseers (1 Timothy 3:7).

The epistle of 1 Timothy has a number of references to heretical or destructive teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 1:19-20, 4:7, 6:20-21). These references are at such key points in the letter (including the introduction and conclusion) that Gordon Fee has argued that the threat of destructive teaching was the main reason why Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles, and is behind much of what Paul writes. (G.D. Fee, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus [NIBC; Rev Ed.; USA:Hendrickson, 1988]).

But do we know what this destructive teaching was? We can only conjecture with an educated guess. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus, while Paul moved on to Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3). Ephesus was unusual in that the chief deity was a goddess, Artemis. Being a goddess-centered religion, female religious teachers would be prominent in Ephesus. Therefore, “*The very existence of female teachers might have led outsiders to conclude that Christianity was an offshoot of an Ephesian pagan religion.*” (‘I Suffer not a Woman’ [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], Richard and Catherine Kroeger). Not only was female-deity religion prominent in Ephesus, but the authors present evidence some of these practices were pervading Jewish and Christian teaching in the region. There appear to have been distortions of the Genesis creation story (the

“myths and endless genealogies” of 1 Timothy 1:4?), in which Eve was the hero. In light of this background, it is not hard to imagine that Paul would have given this command with the following parenthetical nuance:

“(In this culture, women teachers are a hallmark of Ephesian pagan religion, therefore) I am not permitting a woman to teach or usurp man's authority. For (in contrast to what the false teachers are saying) Adam was created first... and the woman was deceived...”

Appendix D - An Analysis of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. I Corinthians 14:34-35

At first glance it might appear that Paul is saying that women should not speak in church at all. But such an interpretation is problematic for several reasons. First of all, such an interpretation would flatly contradict Paul's instruction in chapter 11, verse 5: “every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.” Since he instructs women how to pray and prophesy, he cannot mean here that women are not to speak at all.

Secondly, it is clear from the context that Paul is dealing with issues of disorderly conduct in the congregation. In the previous verse (33a), Paul concludes his instructions on prophecy, and introduces this instruction with the adage: “God is not a God of disorder, but of peace.” He continues this theme of disorderly conduct in verses 34 and 35.