



SHARON CAIRNS MANN

C A L L E D

&

G I F T E D

Study Guide

FOR FACILITATORS

CALLED & GIFTED

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PREFACE

Impressive scholarship on the subject of the biblical perspective on the role of women in the church, home, and society abounds. There are any number of books that you can pick up on the subject that delve deeply into the question from a variety of viewpoints. In fact, there are so many books to read and study that it is almost intimidating: where does one begin? Many times in my own transition from traditionalist to egalitarian I wished for a simple, concise, step-by-step guide to the egalitarian position.

In my service as a member of the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality for the Evangelical Covenant Church, I searched for just exactly that kind of guide: a good introductory overview written for lay people, something thorough but readable.

Unable to find such a resource, the commission decided to write the study guide that we envisioned. We wanted to create a first step for those who desire to study this subject but don't know where to begin. It isn't possible to adequately cover the topic in detail in nine sessions, so we don't claim that this material is comprehensive. But each of these sessions provides a fine first look at an important component of this subject.

Most importantly, the sessions are never dogmatic and they leave open the option for people to make up their own minds. The sessions serve as an

Preface

irenic starting point for calm group study and discussion, without being overbearing or strident.

Additionally, these sessions were written for a broad audience, not for any particular denomination. While the commission hopes that members of the Evangelical Covenant Church will find this study guide useful, our vision goes far beyond the confines of our denomination.

So many people have been involved with this project that it is difficult to thank everyone by name. This project would not have come to life at all if it were not for the bold leadership of the Evangelical Covenant Church and for the dedicated members of the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality, all of whom staunchly advocated for this type of study aid.

In addition, this material has benefited greatly from the scholarly input from Dr. Klyne Snodgrass, the Paul W. Brandel Professor of New Testament Studies at North Park Theological Seminary; from the expertise from Doreen Olson and Debbie Blue of the ECC's Department of Christian Formation; and from Jeff Norman's (of Modesto Covenant Church) thoughtful analysis and suggestions for activities. Judith Diehl kindly assisted with the meanings of words in Hebrew, and Carol Lawson of the ECC's Department of the Ordered Ministry wisely shepherded this piece through all of its stages of development. I express my thanks to each one of you!

I also thank the participants of the various groups who "piloted" this material for your willingness to spend your valuable time on this project and provide feedback.

May God greatly bless each one of you and may the name of Jesus be glorified through this work.

TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR

Thank you for volunteering to facilitate this study. As a facilitator, you are a resource to the adult learners in this study group. We did not design this course to be “taught” by an expert or lecturer; rather, it was designed for group discussion and group experience, guided by a facilitator. We hope you see yourself as a partner in the learning experience, rather than a teacher.

This study might seem content heavy. The goal is not for every student to memorize every argument or Greek word. Rather, the goal is to introduce students to the egalitarian position on gender roles in the church without being dogmatic. The two key objectives that support that goal are 1) to enable people to begin to discuss this subject by giving them a voice in a nonthreatening environment; and 2) to create a gateway for learning more about this subject by supplying them with exposure to the topic and a tool (the study guide itself) for future reference.

Since the materials themselves carry the “teaching/content” role, the role of the facilitator is not to be the expert or the teacher; rather, the role of the facilitator is to help participants interact with the information and with each other to process this information in a safe, nonthreatening way.

Adult learners have a wide range of learning styles and previous experi-

Tips for the Facilitator

ences that influence how they assimilate new information. The facilitator's version of the material contains suggestions for preparation, possible answers to discussion questions, and activities that are not printed in the participants' version. This material is identified by the following symbol: ✕.

The group activities may enhance the learning experience for the individuals in your study group. We suggest that you use your own discernment, based on your reading of the group, in selecting, adapting, or omitting these activities. How you handle group discussions should also depend on the size of your group. In order to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and participate, you may want to divide into smaller groups.

Your group meetings will be much more beneficial to all if each member comes prepared, having read the appropriate lesson before the session. This will also give you enough class time to discuss the material. Please stress to the participants, even before your first meeting, that they should read the material in advance.

May God bless you as you create a safe space for people to experience the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ.

UNIT ONE

Building Community

SESSION ONE

Asking Honest Questions

✂ Advance Planning for the Facilitator

The goal for this session is to create a comfort level for the group members and create some shared understandings about terminology. As you plan for this group study, make sure each participant has a book and has an opportunity to read the session before the first meeting. It will help set the tone for a friendly, calm discussion.

Pray about your class in advance. If you already know the names of the participants, pray for them by name.

Study the materials so you are well prepared.

✂ The Day of the Class

- 1) Introduce yourself and explain your role as facilitator or guide.*
- 2) Convey your personal excitement about this opportunity to facilitate this group in the study of the roles of men and women in church.*
- 3) Assure them that it is your desire and everyone else's to stay true to the word of God.*
- 4) Congratulate them for being at the study. You can say something like, "Congratulations for being here. I know that discussing this subject may make you feel uncomfortable sometimes. I am committed to making*

everyone feel heard and to making this a rewarding experience for all concerned.”

- 5) *Have the group members introduce themselves.*
- 6) *Have each one answer a warm-up question. You can create your own or select one of the following. The warm-up question is designed to be provocative but not require a learned response, nor require them to state their position on this subject.*

Q: Why did you decide to come to this study? What do you hope to learn?

Q: What makes you nervous about studying the subject of the roles of men and women in the church?

Q: What are the big questions about this topic for you?

Q: Why is this a subject that makes us uncomfortable? Possible answers:

A: It gets at the core of who we are—we are either male or female and our identity is intimately and inseparably linked to that biological fact.

A: It's about control.

A: It's about our fear that moving away from tradition means moving toward cultural accommodation.

Q: What models of leadership are prominent in your church? In the wider church? Where did these models come from? (This is an especially good question if this class is not being taught in a church and the members come from a variety of backgrounds.)

✂ Group Exercise

In order to make this a good learning experience, set some ground rules for discussion. Ask the group to create and agree on their own rules. Creating their own rules gives them a sense of ownership about the process. Ask, “What rules are important to you to ensure a respectful but vigorous discussion?” Here are some suggestions:

- Raise your hand if you want to speak.*
- Do not interrupt the leader.*
- Do not interrupt fellow group members when they are speaking.*

- *Be committed to really listen to others.*
- *Be respectful: no ad hominem attacks, no name calling. You can attack a position but not the person stating it.*
- *Always back up your claim with evidence.*
- *Maintain confidentiality.*

Once you set the ground rules, dive into the study!

Our beliefs about the roles of men and women in the home, church, and society are important to us. These beliefs are at the root of who we are and how we think about social relations. Because these beliefs are rooted in deeply held convictions about the way the world is or should be, it is easy to become angry or fearful when these convictions are challenged. It is important to enter this study knowing that others may challenge our personal beliefs and that this is a subject that makes some people uncomfortable.

And yet, what can be more important than understanding what God has to say about our identities as men and women? Understanding what God created us to be makes a difference in how we live every minute of our lives! We hope you are looking forward to this study—it may be one of the most rewarding studies of your life.

Why Study This Subject?

Many people have already formed an opinion about this subject, believing that they already know what the Bible says about it. Some are so convinced of their position that they are baffled that there is any debate at all. Others are new to the subject and are also confused by the fact that there is a debate. Some are simply intimidated by the subject, hate debate, and are afraid to examine it. Still others seem to cherish and deliberately stir up debate!

As people who desire to follow Christ, we need to take an intense interest in any subject that affects people. As believers, we are part of the body of Christ—the church—and we must recognize that many other members of the body of Christ are asking serious and honest questions about the roles of women in the church. And, as part of the body, we must take those

questions seriously and respond to the challenge to engage in rethinking this issue. Our views on this issue influence the lives and ministries of women around the world. In addition, the views we hold on this subject have direct outcomes in our own lives, such as influencing where we worship and how we use the spiritual gifts we have been given. There are practical outcomes that result from the views we hold—we must be absolutely certain that our views align themselves as closely as possible with biblical teaching.

“SCRIPTURE GIVES US many examples that show us that God approves of honest questioning. The Book of Job reveals the questioning heart as Job cries out to God in his agonized search for why such troubles have befallen him, a man who has tried to honor and serve God to the very best of his ability. The Prophet Jeremiah is another questioner, and in many places the writers of the Psalms ask such tough questions as ‘Why do the wicked prosper?’”

Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, *Equal to Serve* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 30.

What Are the Different Positions on Gender Roles in the Church?

It is important to note that people who are passionately committed to the accuracy and authority of Scripture hold different opinions on this subject. Just because someone holds a different opinion than you do does not mean that they do not earnestly seek to follow God’s word.

The positions that Christians take on the subject of gender roles in the church fall into three basic categories. Naturally, there is a considerable range of opinions and beliefs within each category.

Traditional (also known as hierarchical or patriarchal). This position believes (with some variations) that there are fundamental differences between males and females that *dictate* different gender-based roles in the home, church, and society. As a result, people who hold this view believe, with varying degrees of intensity, that:

- Women should be silent in mixed gatherings.
- Women should not be in any “leadership” position over men.

- Women should not have “authority” over men.
- It is the responsibility of men to lead and teach in public worship.
- Only men have the authority to make decisions in the church.
- Only men can provide spiritual instruction to other men, therefore only men can hold positions such as pastor, elder, or adult teacher.

Complementarian.¹ Like traditionalists, complementarian beliefs are rooted in the idea that there is some fundamental difference between males and females that results in the need for men and women to hold different roles. Some complementarians, however, tend to be less restrictive than traditionalists. They hold that there are many offices in the church that are open to women, but that there are a few restrictions. Some believe, for example, that women can serve in almost any capacity except as a senior pastor.

Egalitarian.² The egalitarian position is rooted in the belief that God created both men and women to share equally in the dominion of the earth, in procreation, and in ministry. Egalitarians do not believe that there are no differences between men and women, or that men and women are interchangeable; rather they emphasize that men and women were both created in the image of God and were created for full and equal partnership. Therefore, they recognize the full dignity of each individual in Christ and do not see biological sex as a limiting factor in ministry. Egalitarians believe that God’s enduring principles are about equality of all people and equal partnership in ministry. Egalitarians view the biblical passages that seem to limit women’s roles in ministry as temporary restrictions for the particular local, cultural situation. As a result, egalitarians believe that any office of the church is open to men and women, and that service in the church should be based on giftedness not gender.

Personal Convictions

Sometimes people come to an issue like this believing that they have a purely objective opinion, and that others don’t. It is important to understand that all of our convictions about this issue—or any other issue—are deeply influenced by the experiences and teaching we’ve received. We each

need to recognize that our experiences have influenced our thinking, and that our experiences are not the final authority for understanding a biblical issue.

How We See the World

In trying to understand how different people—even those who call themselves Christians—can arrive at such different conclusions, we must consider our “worldviews.” What does that mean? The word came into English use in the mid-nineteenth century, when it was translated from the German *weltanschauung*, meaning literally *welt* (world) and *anschauung* (view).

Our worldviews (and everyone has one) are how we see the world and the important questions about the world and reality, such as, “What was the origin of the universe?” “What is the purpose of life?” “What is real?” and how we see God and ourselves in relation to the world and those questions. All humans ask these questions and the way we answer these questions becomes the basis for the way we think, act, and make decisions.

It is important to be aware of our own worldview because it helps us analyze our own perspective on things. We grow into our worldview as a result of the way we have been socialized by parents, siblings, church, media, and school as well as by the way we have experienced the world.

While there are hundreds of competing worldviews, most people who call themselves Christians adhere to a “theistic” worldview. Theism acknowledges that there is a personal God who created the universe and who has given moral principles.

As we study the different “positions” on gender roles that we mentioned above, it is important to note that they are *all* rooted in a theistic worldview—which, thankfully, means that even if we hold a different position from someone else in this area, we have more in common than not, and *what we have in common is important*.

Conclusion

Most believers sincerely want to do what God tells them to do and to be obedient to his teachings. Unfortunately, as we will see as we move

through this study, there are honest disagreements about how to translate certain passages in the Bible, and genuine differences of opinion about how to interpret what it is that God is teaching. It is important to always affirm in others their desire to be faithful to doctrine, while examining how our personal backgrounds and worldviews influence the stands they—and we—take.

Discussion Questions

** Depending on the size of the group, you may want to divide into smaller groups of three or four for this discussion. Ensure that everyone has a voice. Draw out those who don't seem to talk much. Don't let any one individual dominate the discussion.*

- 1) Why should believers study this subject?

- 2) What are some of the practical outcomes of our views on the roles of women in the church?

- 3) Would you call yourself a traditionalist, a complementarian, or an egalitarian? How does that translate into what you believe about the roles of women in the church?

- 4) How did you develop this view? List the familial, cultural, and biblical influences that contributed to the formation of your view.

✘ If people in your class say, “I just want to do what the Bible says,” that is a perfect transition into Session 2, which delves into the ways we interpret the Bible.

For Reflection

Reflect on the following verse. Take time to study it in its larger context. Ask yourself, “What did Paul really mean?”

“For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

✘ Suggestions for Activities

Objective: *Illustrate the concepts of worldview or paradigm.*

Materials needed: *globe or world map*

Instructions: *Hold a globe or a world map upside down in front of the group. Ask, “What’s wrong with this picture?” Process with the group the fact that we assume that north will be portrayed on the top and south on the bottom. But in reality, is that how the world is? How does the world look from outer space? Does our worldview that north is always “on top” reinforce a cultural bias? Does it reinforce the view that the “developed” superpowers of the United States and Europe are dominant or more important than “lesser developed” countries in the Southern Hemisphere?*

Objective: *Study concepts of worldview or paradigm in a biblical story.*

Materials needed: *Bibles*

Instructions: *Read John 9:1-34. In the story of Jesus healing the blind man in John 9, we see people reacting to a new situation on the basis of their existing mindsets or paradigms. Discuss examples of people in this passage and whether they have open minds or closed minds. If your group is large, you may want to break up into smaller groups.*

Objective: *Explore the issue in practice.*

Instructions: *Discuss the following situation. Imagine that you are going to try out First Church for a few weeks. How would you tell what view they take on this issue? What specific things would you look for? What would some clues be?*

Endnotes

1. See “Complementarianism—What’s in a Name” by Rebecca Merrill Groothuis for a more fully developed discussion of the label “complementarian,” available at http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/free_articles/complementarianism.shtml.

2. A few people claim to be “complementarian egalitarians.” Given the general understanding of who and what the term “complementarian” refers to, it is a misappropriation and contradiction of terms. A complementarian position is a hierarchical position. It is simply a modification of a traditional view, which is why the term “neotraditional” is probably more appropriate. Again, see the article by Groothuis mentioned in endnote 1 for a full development of this concept.

SESSION TWO

How Do We Interpret the Bible?

✂ Advance Planning for the Facilitator

The goal of this week's session is to raise people's awareness of how the Bible is translated and interpreted. Of necessity, it is merely a brief overview, but the session establishes definitions and helps create shared understandings that will facilitate future discussions.

✂ Going Deeper

*In preparation, you may want to do some research on your own on the subjects of Bible translation, interpretation, and hermeneutics (the theory and methodology of interpretation). The other study guide in this suite of material, *All God's People* by John E. Phelan Jr., more deeply examines some of the challenges and principles of interpretation.*

Note that discussion questions 1-4 can be used as warm-up questions for this session. Question 3 connects back to worldviews, discussed in Session 1. Question 4 brings up the difference between interpreting and understanding the intent of the original writer and application to our own lives today—it may generate some interesting discussion. These need some careful thought and perhaps input from a pastor as they raise some significant theological issues.

Most Christians believe that the Bible is the word of God. As such, they have a high view of the Bible and believe that the original texts should be translated with the utmost precision. While many enjoy a paraphrased version for general reading, most want the Bible they use for personal study to be a translation that is as close as possible to what the original text really meant, while still being understandable.

Paradoxes and Presuppositions

There are many apparent contradictions in the Bible on a variety of subjects. These contradictions create seemingly unsolvable paradoxes. For example, sincere believers continue to debate topics such as eternal security, limited atonement, and the gift of tongues because there seems to be biblical support for positions on both sides of the argument. Some suggest that theological debates are circular; that is, where an individual ends up on an issue frequently seems to depend on where he or she began. Where one ends up in these debates is frequently the result of one's personal biases plus an inclination to put more weight on certain passages than others.

It is important to note that these contradictions have emerged because of our faulty understandings, not because Scripture is at fault. The Bible is one consistent story and our interpretation of it must involve the habits of 1) allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, and 2) balancing all the texts in a way that does justice to all that God has said. In addition to the key hermeneutical principles of looking at the cultural, historical, and textual context in which a passage was written, we must deal with the whole text in order to understand specific texts: in other words, look at the passage in the context of the totality of the teaching of all Scripture. This principle should be central in how we approach the subject of biblical gender equality as well. In a Bible study, believers should seek to be honest and humble in how they

Key verse

"THESE JEWS were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so."—Acts 17:11

approach the study, to set aside their personal biases to the greatest extent possible, and to recognize that God's story is a consistent story. We must, in humility, try to discern God's story, not impose our own on it.

Being biblical people is not always easy: some texts on this subject (and others) are difficult to understand and require intense study and much prayer. Others texts are too patently clear, and our problem isn't understanding them—it's obeying them.

✂ *Discussion question 5 refers to the above section.*

Basics of Interpretation

God was trying to say something through the human writers of the Bible to both the first hearers and readers of any particular passage, as well as to today's hearers and readers. Consequently, when people, whether scholars or laypersons, try to interpret the Bible, they should always ask two fundamental questions: 1) What was the author trying to say to the first hearers and readers of this passage? 2) What is the significance of the intent of the original author for us today?

Interpreting the Bible is not an easy task. It requires great scholarship to understand what the original authors were saying to the first hearers—after all, the Bible was recorded over a period of several thousand years in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Scholars must consistently depend on tried and true principles for translation and interpretation.

For example, two important principles are that 1) we can never simply discard a text just because its meaning is difficult to discern, nor 2) can we

"MANY AUTHORS in their attempt to prove what Scripture says about women, begin immediately to look at the various Scripture passages that are relevant. Two dangers exist: one is that the Scripture that is chosen as relevant depends on the author's already established position; and the other is that Scripture appears to say what we already believe it says."

Marilyn B. Smith, *Gender or Giftedness* (World Evangelical Fellowship Commission on Women's Concerns, 2000), 2.

abandon Scripture just because it doesn't seem relevant for today.

Another principle is that, in order to interpret any text, we must always seek to understand the context. We can't begin to make sense of a passage until we answer basic contextual questions, including when, where, and why was it written and by whom. Scholars can learn the answers to these questions primarily through a careful, discerning reading of the text itself, and then the larger text of God's word. Then they can go beyond the text and look at other sources, such as literature, history, and stories that can shed light on that particular culture.

When we move to the question of what it means to us today, we must also apply certain principles of interpretation. For example, we must ask that question in light of all the other biblical passages on the same topic. We must also avoid the trap of individualism—that is, applying it only to me—and not asking what its relevance is for all of us today. God's word is for the church, not merely for each of us as individuals.

Finally, we must be aware of how the filter of our worldviews might color the way we hear, understand, and interpret Scripture.

Problems

We all want to hear what God says to us, and we rely on translators to render the Bible accurately. And yet, translators bring to the endeavor their own biases and assumptions. That's why teams and committees are assembled to work together to translate the Bible, so that there is a community of agreement about the translation. Still, the people who comprise these teams might *all* be subject to the same bias or cultural understanding, or develop a collective identity with its own biases and cultural understanding.

For example, it appears that Junia (*Iounian*) was both a woman and an apostle. Early translators of the Bible accepted this¹ and no one suggested that Junia was a man until the thirteenth century. But since then, many translators, perhaps unable to accept that a woman could be an apostle, present Junia as a male, even renaming her Junias, a linguistic improbability.² The result is that we have translations that inaccurately form our beliefs about what the Bible teaches about women.

Besides inaccuracies in translations, we also have the problem of com-

peting paradigms. Similar to a worldview, a paradigm is the philosophical or theoretical framework in which our ideas, theories, and views are developed. For example, the paradigm that the world is flat results in certain claims, laws, theories, and generalizations. The paradigm that the world is round generates other claims, theories, and rules.

Paradigms are so taken for granted that they are hard to perceive. Even when they are perceived, moving from one paradigm to another can be hard to do. And, finally, some paradigms, by their nature, compete with one another for our loyalties because they are mutually exclusive. You cannot believe, for example, that the world is flat *and* the world is round.

LEARN MORE about the history of Bible translation by watching an informative video at www.tniv.info (available in your choice of streaming video formats).

✂ *Discussion question 6 refers to the above section.*

Paradigms Relating to Gender Roles

In the first session, we identified the three basic positions on the roles of women in the church. These positions grow out of paradigms. While there are *three* basic positions, there are only *two* paradigms because both the traditionalist view and the complementarian view grow out of the paradigm of hierarchy, i.e., that men have God-given authority over women, and that women are restricted because of their gender, while men are not. This paradigm is rooted in a belief that the consequence of Adam and Eve's sin (Adam ruling over Eve) is *prescriptive* for all men and women—that is, it is God's punishment for all time. This hierarchical paradigm consists of ideas about power, dominance, authority, and submission. The result is the belief that one of the qualifications for leadership is biological (i.e., maleness), not just gifts and calling.

The egalitarian view grows out of a paradigm of redemption. The redemption paradigm interprets the overarching story of the Bible as being the restoration of God's original intent for community: oneness, equality, mutuality, and service. The redemption paradigm views the gospel message

as liberating us from old divisions. In addition, authority is seen as residing in God or God's word; leadership is not viewed as having authority but as being a servant; the result of Adam and Eve's sin is seen as being *descriptive*, rather than *prescriptive*. In this paradigm, leadership is based on gifts not biological sex.

Conclusion

In this session, we have examined some of the challenges of translations and interpretations. We have also looked at how one's operating paradigm can influence one's position on the issue of women in ministry.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Do you believe the Bible is really the word of God?

- 2) If so, how important to you is it that it is accurately translated?

- 3) Many sincere believers are bewildered by the fact that different people can read the same text and believe different things about what it really says. How can we account for the fact that different people interpret the same passage in different ways?
** Note that this question is not getting at translation issues, per se, but the broader issue of individual interpretation.*

How Do We Interpret the Bible?

- 4) What are some of the challenges of biblical translation?
- 5) Can you give an example of the suggestion above that theological debates are circular?
- 6) Can you identify any paradigms under which you operate?
- 7) Discuss the two paradigms of hierarchy and redemption. How do these paradigms influence particular positions on the subject of women's roles in the church? Does framing the discussion with the idea of paradigms help you understand your own position better?
- 8) Is it possible to operate out of one paradigm, because that's the way you were taught, but really believe in another one? Can you give an example?

✂ Suggestions for Activities

Objective: *Give students the opportunity to ask questions and give answers in an anonymous way. This group exercise can be done at any point during the lesson.*

Materials needed: *pieces of paper; a timer or watch with minute hand.*

Instructions: *Ask each participant to write down a question related to this session. Ask them to crumple their papers and toss it to another individual in the room (so that each person ends up with one piece of paper). Have each person read the question and write an answer. Explain that you are timing this. After a minute or two, call “time,” and again, have them crumple their papers and toss it to another person. Depending on time and interest, you can stop the exercise here and have this recipient read the question and answer. However, if time allows, you can repeat this process several times so that each question receives multiple answers, thus allowing for multiple viewpoints to be expressed.*

Objective: *Look beyond the gender issue to show that there are numerous other biblical passages that can be used to illustrate the need for careful interpretation. A few examples include:*

- *How many people do you know who only have one hand because they followed Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 5:30? “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.”*
- *What about Paul and Peter’s exhortations that women not wear pearls or braided hair (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3)? Should we take these instructions literally?*
- *What about Jesus’ instructions to the rich young man in Matthew 19:21: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor.” Are we to take this literally?*
- *In an era when we are concerned about protecting our boundaries, how literally do we take Matthew 5:39-42? How literally should we take it? “But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the*

second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.”

- *Why don't we feel compelled to follow Paul's numerous instructions to greet each other with a holy kiss?*

Endnotes

1. Andrew Perriman, *Speaking of Women* (London: Apollos, 1998), 68-70.
2. Ibid.

UNIT TWO

History of Men and Women in
the Bible and in the Church

SESSION THREE

Starting at the Beginning

The goal for this session is to take a fresh look at the creation story and to try to discern God's original intent for the relationship between men and women.

The Creation Account and Humanity

The story of how God created human beings holds some keys about God's plan for humans. What does the text tell us? Compare these two versions:

Genesis 1:26-31 (NIV)

26. Then God said, "Let us make man (*adam*) 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."
27. So God created man (*adam*) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
28. 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.”

29. Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.
30. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.
31. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Genesis 1:26-31 (TNIV)

26. Then God said, “Let us make human beings (*adam*) in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”
27. So God created human beings (*adam*) in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
28. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”
29. Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.
30. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.
31. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

First, let us address some confusion about the word *adam*, a Hebrew word with a semantic range that can mean any person or human being, or male humans, or it can refer specifically to Adam, the individual. Note that *adama* is also the word for “earth” or “ground.” Various versions of the Bible translate *adam* in the Genesis passages differently: as “man,” “human beings,” “humankind,” and “humans.”¹ As noted above, for example, the NIV translates Genesis 1:26 as, “Let us make man (*adam*) in our image. . . and let them rule.” Nonetheless, it is clear that grammatically *adam* is plural, so a better rendition of this word would be “humankind” or “human beings,” because today “man” is no longer considered a generic term for both men and women. (See sidebar below.)

Verse 27 neatly repeats what was just said in verse 26 and both verses reveal a key point: both males and females were created in God’s image—equally. There is no hint in these verses that there is any status difference between the two sexes, nothing that hints that women were created as a damaged or inferior image of God, or that men were created in a more perfect image of God. The word of God clearly states that both male and female were created in the image of God, and together reflect the image of God.

Verse 28 goes on to reveal that God blessed *them*. God blessed both sexes, and there is no indication otherwise. In the same verse, God gives

MOST PEOPLE today recognize that *man* is a *false generic*—that is, it is not a generic term for humankind. A *true generic* “is equally applicable to a class or group or to its individual members.”* So, for example, we could call Mother Teresa a fine *human* or a wonderful *person*, but we could not call her a good *man*. In other words, *human* and *person* are true generics because they refer to both the group of humans and to *either* individual male or female humans. Since *man* cannot be applied to individual female members, it is not a true generic. Consequently, it cannot and should not be applied to the class (humans) because it does not accurately refer to all members.

*Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 11. This book provides a thorough discussion of man as a false generic.

a command to *them* (*both* male and female). The command is to be fruitful, increase in number, fill the earth, subdue it, rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and over every living creature that moves on the ground. There is not any ambiguity about the fact that the command was given to both female and male. Again, there is no hint of superiority or lack of equality between the two sexes. Some people argue that God gave this command to Adam before Eve was created, but there is no evidence to support that theory. The account here in Genesis 1 gives the general story of the creation of humans and the account in chapter 2 gives the specifics of how it happened. A key point to observe is that although Genesis 1 and 2 give two different views of creation, both of them, in their different ways, underscore that *God is the creator* and the unique role that humans have in his purpose.

“MANY PEOPLE look to the order of creation (man created before woman) as the model or standard by which we are to determine the functions of women within the church and home. The difficulty is that there is confusion about what the creation story actually tells us regarding God’s intended plan for male and female relationships. The confusion results from our tendency to read into Scripture what we have been taught it says rather than approach Scripture free of bias and let it speak to us.”

Marilyn B. Smith, *Gender or Giftedness* (World Evangelical Fellowship Commission on Women’s Concerns, 2000), 2.

And finally, in verse 31, God’s word reveals that God was pleased with what he had created. This certainly implies that the *equality* between the two kinds of humans *pleased* God and had been blessed by God. In order to please God, the quality of the creation had to have been excellent.

✠ *Discussion questions 1 and 2 refer to the above section.*

Details about the Creation of Humans

Genesis 2:4-25 is a more detailed account of the creation of humans and demonstrates the various ways that *adam* can be translated. The pas-

sage clearly shows that *adam* is a word that, like certain English words, does double duty and can only be understood in context. (For example, think of all the meanings for English words such as “well” or “bank” and yet when English speakers use these words, they communicate their intended meaning with little or no difficulty.) Insisting that *adam* be translated “man” when it is clearly not the intended meaning compromises the integrity of the text for readers.

4. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,
5. when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one [*adam*, generic human] to till the ground;
6. but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—
7. then the LORD God formed man [here *adam* refers to male, singular] from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man [*adam*, male singular] became a living being.
8. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man [*adam*, male singular] whom he had formed.
9. Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
10. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches.
11. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;
12. and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.

13. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush.
14. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.
15. The LORD God took the man [*adam*, human being] and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.
16. And the LORD God commanded the man [*adam*, human being], “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;
17. but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”
18. Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man [*adam*] should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”
19. So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man [most versions translate *adam* here and in the next occurrence in this verse as man, male singular, although both the King James and the New King James versions translate it as Adam, a proper name] to see what he would call them; and whatever the man [*adam*] called every living creature, that was its name.
20. The man [as in the previous verse, most versions translate the first occurrence of *adam* in this verse as man, male singular, although both the King James and the New King James versions translate it as Adam, a proper name] gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man [several versions translate *adam* here as Adam, the male being’s proper name, even though the same Hebrew word is used] there was not found a helper as his partner.
21. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man [*adam*], and he slept; then he took one of his [*adam*] ribs and closed up its place with flesh.
22. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man [*adam*, male singular] he made into a woman [*ishba*] and brought her to the man [*adam*].

23. Then the man [some versions translate *adam* here as man, singular male, while others translate it as Adam, a proper name for the male being] said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman [*ishsha*], for out of Man [*ish*, notice a different word for man is used here] this one was taken.”
24. Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife [*ishsha*, notice that *ishsha* is translated woman in verse 22, and wife in this verse and the next], and they become one flesh.
25. And the man [*adam*, generic human or person] and his wife [*ishsha*] were both naked, and were not ashamed.

✠ *Discussion questions 3-6 refer to the above section.*

What Kind of Companion Did God Make for Adam?

In Genesis 2:18 we read that God declared, “I will make a helper as his partner [*'ezer knegdo*],” and again in verse 20, we read, “there was not found a helper as his partner.” The Hebrew word *'ezer* is frequently translated as “helper,” which some have come to interpret or understand as an inferior or one in a supporting role. Unlike the English word “helper,” the Hebrew *'ezer* implies no inferiority; in fact, this word most frequently refers to God in the Old Testament, meaning *protector or rescuer*.² Its modifier, *knegdo*, means “suitable,” “face to face,” “equivalent to,” or “visible,” and indicates that God created an equivalent human being to be a good companion for the male being he had created. Read as “ally” or “equivalent protector,” *'ezer knegdo* implies neither authority nor subordination for either man or woman.

In addition, there is no indication in the Genesis 2 account that God ordained patriarchy; however, we will see in the next section that patriarchy shows up in Genesis 3 as a result of sin—the thirst for dominance and the abuse of power.

✠ *Discussion question 7 refers to the above section.*

Damage to the Plan

In the following passage of Genesis 3:1-19 we read about how sin (that is, disobedience to God) damaged God's plan.

1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'"
2. The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;
3. but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'"
4. But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die;
5. for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
6. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.
7. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.
8. They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
9. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"
10. He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."
11. He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"
12. The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

13. Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”
14. The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.
15. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”
16. To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”
17. And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
18. thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.
19. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

In this passage we see that many good relationships were damaged by sin:

- the relationship between people and God,
- the relationship between people and nature,
- the relationship between people and people (Adam and Eve, male and female), and
- the relationship between one of God’s created beings (the serpent) and God.

THE FOLLOWING websites offer more discussion on gender equality:

- www.gal328.org
- www.equalitycentral.com
- www.patriciagundry.com
- www.cbeinternational.org

When God addressed Eve in Genesis 3:16, he described what would happen as a result of this sin. Some people see this passage as a “prescriptive” declaration—the way things *should* be—the way God wanted things ordered from now on. Others insist that it is “descriptive,” that God was describing the future results of sin: that the equality and mutuality between Eve and Adam would now be marred. God’s perfect plan of equality had been damaged, corrupted into an asymmetrical relationship of domination and subordination. The corruption affected both male and female: it is a corruption to become a “ruler” if God’s plan is for equality, just as it is a corruption to become the “ruled one.”

✠ *Discussion question 8 refers to the above section.*

Conclusion

In this session, we’ve taken a fresh look at the creation story. For those who have been taught that certain verses in the Genesis account imply dominance and subordination between male and female, this kind of fresh study can be startling. Tradition and cultural biases have led to a traditionalist view being taught as normative—that is, how things *should* be. But we have seen that God’s original intent was for equality, mutuality, and respect between men and women. This plan was damaged by sin, corrupting the symmetrical relationship that Adam and Eve had and turning it into something that God had not planned for humans.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Is there anything that surprises you about the creation account given in Genesis 1?

Starting at the Beginning

- 2) As you study the account now, does it differ from what you've been taught in any way?

- 3) From what did God make Adam and the animals?

- 4) From what did God make Eve?

- 5) What does it mean when Adam declares that Eve was “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”?
✘ This question relates to equality of substance. It implies that Eve was made out of identical material as Adam. Imagine whipping up a batch of play dough at home. You fashion a person out of the mixture. But then you decide that you want another person, so you pinch off half of it to make a new dough person. Is the new figure inferior to the first one? Is it made out of material that is any different? No, it's the same stuff.

- 6) Is there any inferiority implied in Adam's declaration?

- 7) Is there anything in the Genesis 2:4-25 text that shows that because God created Eve to be a “helper” for Adam, that God intended hierarchy for these two created beings?

✂ *This question relates to equality of role and function.*

- 8) When God addressed Eve in Genesis 3:16, do you think God was describing what would happen or prescribing what would happen?

✂ Suggestions for Activities

Objective: *Gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be created in the image of God.*

Materials: *Newsprint (flip chart paper) for each group.*

Instructions: *Divide into smaller groups. Ask the question, “What does it mean to be created in the image of God?” Have each group write three answers—two true and one false—on a piece of newsprint. Have each group read its answers out loud and ask the rest of the class to call out or write down “true” or “false” for each statement. See if any discussion ensues. If you decide not to do this exercise, you may still want to pose the question, because it is an important consideration for this session.*

Possible “true” answers:

- *God is spirit, which means we have a spiritual component to our makeup.*
- *We were created free from sin.*
- *We were endowed at creation with rational, emotional, and moral characteristics. These characteristics enabled us to know*

and love God. That is, we are able to have a relationship with God.

- *The ability to name things, subdue, and rule.*
- *Immortality.*
- *God is a creator. We, having been created in God's image, are called to be creators as well—to give artistic expression to our experience of life and our worship of God.*
- *The Hebrew understanding of God, as well as church tradition, is that God is neither male nor female.*

Based on these points, we can see that being made in the image of God has nothing to do with our biological sex, and we can infer nothing from the statement that we are created in the image of God that would indicate that males are superior to females.

In Preparation for Next Week

Read Judges 4 and 5; 2 Kings 22:1–23:25; and 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19.

Endnotes

1. See <http://www.bibletexts.com/terms/heb-adam.htm> for more details about all the various ways *adam* can be and has been translated, including an easy-to-read chart that lists how different Bible versions have translated the word in different verses.

2. The word *'ezer* is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament, and it refers to God fifteen of those times (Exodus 15:2; 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; 1 Kings 7:12; 2 Samuel 22:42; Psalm 9:10; 33:20; 69:6; 89:19, 20; 115:9-11). Because the word *'ezer* so frequently refers to God, it could be interpreted as implying a superior status, except that its modifier *knegdo* seems to point to equivalency—not superiority or inferiority. Or, as Andrew Perriman points out, “What the word defines is not essentially the status of the helper (the helper may be either superior or inferior), but the condition of the one in need of help. This is of considerable importance. We cannot conclude from the position of Eve as helper that she was placed under the authority of man.” Andrew C. Perriman (*Speaking of Women*[London: Apollos, 1998], 179.)

SESSION FOUR

Women in the Bible: Separating Fact from Myth

The goal of this session is to show that, in spite of a patriarchal culture, God called women to be leaders in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and throughout church history. Humans have corrupted God's original design by creating cultural norms that prohibit women from leadership. In spite of those norms, God calls women into leadership. This session shows that God *overturns* cultural strictures about women in leadership, God doesn't create them.

In Preparation Read

- Judges 4 and 5
- 2 Kings 22:1–23:25
- 2 Chronicles 34:1–35:19

Women in the Old Testament

The Hebrew culture was strongly patriarchal and hierarchical. As stated in the previous session, patriarchy appeared as a result of sin. It is also likely that the Israelites absorbed patriarchal attitudes from the surrounding idolatrous nations. There is no evidence that God ordained hierarchy, nor that the Israelites believed that it was God ordained.¹ As we will see

in this session, God appears to have a different design. God seems to have consistently turned the existing social order on its head.

Both Deborah and Huldah were respected leaders in Israel. They received their authority from God through their godly characters and God-given gifts. Note that Deborah was a judge. To be a judge was to hold the highest-ranking office in Israel. Read Judges 2:16-18. God called (raised up) judges to this leadership position and “whenever the Lord raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge...” (v. 18).

It is interesting to note in these accounts that even the highest-ranking people (generals, priests, and kings) consulted Deborah and Huldah. The texts do not give any indication that there was anything unusual about this, nor do they indicate that there were restrictions on women giving advice to men in other circumstances. In the texts, the people clearly recognized Deborah and Huldah as God’s spokespersons.

✠ *Discussion question 1 refers to the above section.*

Women in the New Testament

By the time Jesus came, the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of the Jewish culture had reached an apex. Essentially, women were confined to the private sphere of the home and family, while males were allowed to fully function in the public sphere. Women were forbidden to study the Torah, and girls were not educated in synagogue schools. Women were not allowed to enter the court of Israel at the temple, and their testimony was not acceptable in court. These are just a few examples of the extreme exclusivity that prevailed when Jesus arrived on the scene—and not just exclusion of women, but of many other types of people. (The other study guide in this series, *All God’s People* by John E. Phelan Jr., provides an in-depth examination of this culture and Jesus’ response to it.) There are many examples of how Jesus turned the cultural norms on their heads, including the following:

- Jesus had women disciples (see Luke 8:1-3).
- When Jesus taught in the temple, he didn’t teach in the restricted

areas, but in the broader courts, where his teaching was accessible to all.

- When questioned by the Pharisees about divorce, Jesus resisted being caught up in their legalistic debate. Instead he exposed double standards and pointed to compassion (Matthew 19:3-10).
- Not only did Jesus teach women, but he also went out of his way to talk to women (John 4:7-42) and heal them. Note that the Samaritan woman went on to become an evangelist and because of her, many Samaritans became believers (John 4:39). Martha also gave testimony of Christ (John 11:27).
- Jesus never patronized women.
- Jesus used women as well as men in his illustrations (Matthew 13:31-33; 24:40-41; 25:1-13; and 14-30; Luke 15:3-7; 15:8-10).

These are just a few examples of how Jesus' ministry completely violated the expected cultural norms, which shows that Jesus did not perpetrate the existing hierarchical and patriarchal society. His actions eradicated that kind of exclusion and restored God's original intent for equality and respect between men and women. As Marilyn Smith says, Jesus stepped in and "revealed a new paradigm, with new values, new attitudes, and new practices."²

Men and Women as Prophets in the Early Church

Read Acts 2:1-21.

1. When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.
2. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
3. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.
4. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.
6. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.
7. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"
8. And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?
9. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,
10. Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
11. Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."
12. All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"
13. But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."
14. But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.
15. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.
16. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:
17. 'In the last days it will 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.
18. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.
19. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
20. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

21. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'”

✂ *Discussion question 2 refers to the above section.*

In this passage, we have the account of the day of Pentecost. What an amazing day that must have been! Both men and women were prophesying, just as Joel had prophesied. Some teach that this is not fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, but that is a direct contradiction of what Peter says. Peter distinctly says that this is “what was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

In addition to the passage above, there are other Scripture texts that show that prophets in the New Testament were both women and men (just as Huldah was a prophet in the Old Testament). See the stories of Anna and Simeon (Luke 2:25-38); the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9); Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32); and the men and women in the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:4-5).

“THE GREEK WORD describing Phoebe is *diaconis* (which clearly means deacon). Some English versions use ‘deaconess’ although there was no such word in Greek at that time. Other translations use ‘servant.’ This is an accurate translation of *diaconis*, but if it is used to describe Phoebe, it also ought to be translated that way when used of the church leaders in Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12, 13, and also to describe Paul, Timothy, Tychicus, and Apollos. It is the same word in all instances. Check your favorite translation to see what is used of Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2 and compare it to the other places in the letters of Paul where it appears: Romans 13:4; 15:8; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:23; Galatians 2:17; Ephesians 3:7; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8, 12-13. The other word used to describe Phoebe in Romans 16:2 is *prostatis*. This is the feminine form of the Greek word that means ‘leader, one who presides, stands before, a patron.’ Most translations, however, have used ‘helper, good friend, assistant’—words that do not express the leadership flavor of the Greek term *prostatis*.”

A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, *Studies on Biblical Equality* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality), 21.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that men and women served side by side in the early church. Women and men were persecuted together, they studied together, and they led together. This is the model, the “redemption paradigm” that we talked about in an early session, that Jesus came to restore and that we should emulate today.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Can you think of other women who played important roles in the history of Israel?
✠ Some suggestions are Miriam (Exodus 2:1-10; 15:20, 21); Abigail (1 Samuel 25:2-38); Hannah (1 Samuel 1:9-11, 21-24); Sarah (Genesis 21:12—notice God tells Abraham to listen to Sarah and do what she says).

- 2) What does it mean to “prophecy”?
✠ A prophet is God’s spokesperson who speaks as directed by God. Note that this is a very authoritative role, since God speaks through the prophet. It is not a diminished role, something less than preaching, for example, as some would claim. In addition, see 1 Corinthians 14:3-5; 14:22-25; 14:26-32; and 14:39-40, which indicate that the gift of prophecy includes strengthening, encouragement, comfort, edification of the church, and evangelism.

- 3) How does studying women leaders in the Bible influence your thinking about women leaders in the church today?

✂ Suggestions for Activities

Divide into smaller groups if appropriate. Read the following verses and list the types of roles women played in the early church.

- *Acts 1:14; 2:15-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5,10: prophetic speaking*
- *Acts 9:1-2: prisoners, martyrs for the faith (women were persecuted equally with men)*
- *Acts 16:13-15, 40: baptized convert, host of the local church*
- *Acts 17:4, 12: prominent Greek women who were converts to the Christian faith*
- *Acts 18:1-4 and 24-28; and 1 Corinthians 16:19: coworkers and teachers (gifted teachers who instructed men)*
- *Romans 16:1-15: In this passage, Paul mentions twenty-seven people, ten of whom are women, and all of whom were well-known leaders in the churches in Rome. Notice in verse 1, Phoebe is specifically mentioned as a deacon, and in verse 7, Junia is specifically named as an apostle (depending on the translation). This list includes women who served as ministers, leaders, elders or governors, and coworkers.*
- *Philippians 4:2-3: coworkers (co-ministers with Paul)*

Ask the participants to examine these texts and others in the New Testament. Ask, “Does the New Testament establish specific church offices or positions?” As New Testament scholar Klyne Snodgrass explains, the functions of bishops, deacons, or elders as described in the New Testament are not offices or positions. They are functions. The description of these functions in the New Testament reflects the local cultural understandings and phenomenon. For example, an elder is simply an older person with wise

counsel for the community, not an official position. Curiously, many complementarians say that women can hold many offices in the church, except for those of elder or senior pastor. However, the concept of senior pastor is a new phenomenon—there is no mention of a lead or senior pastor in the New Testament. This is a good example of how we bring our own presuppositions to the text. If we don't presuppose offices or positions, there is nothing to keep women from full participation in the church.

In Preparation for Next Week

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; Ephesians 1:13-23; 4:11-16; 5:18-23; and Colossians 1:13-20; 2:8-19.

Endnotes

1. A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, *Studies on Biblical Equality* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality), 15.
2. Marilyn B. Smith, *Gender or Giftedness* (World Evangelical Fellowship Commission on Women's Concerns, 2000), 21.

UNIT THREE

What Does Paul Really Teach?

SESSION FIVE

The Meaning of *Kephalē*

While this study guide is focused on the subject of women in ministry, and not on marriage, studying the broader context of what Paul taught about men and women is apropos to this study and leads to a richer understanding of the issues involved.

In discussions about women's roles in the home, church, and society, Christians have given much attention to the passage in Ephesians 5:23, which says, "For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior." Traditionalists have interpreted this to imply some kind of subordination or inferiority of women. Egalitarians, on the other hand, say that nothing of the kind is implied. The debate centers on the Greek word *kephalē*, which is typically translated as the English word "head." This lesson attempts to present an overview of the debate. It is a complex matter, not easily resolved. There are many views and many voices. Sorting through it all can be difficult enough for scholars—it may seem even more daunting for laypeople who don't have a theological background and haven't been schooled in biblical languages. A key thought to keep in mind about this debate is that if it were simple and the answers were crystal clear, there wouldn't be debate!

The goal of this session is to introduce the complexities of the debate, not to solve it for you.

In Preparation Read

- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16
- Ephesians 1:13-23; 4:11-16; 5:18-23
- Colossians 1:13-20; 2:8-19

Paul's Use of *Kephalē*

Let's start by looking at the passages in the New Testament in which Paul uses the word *kephalē* metaphorically. The specific verses in which the word occurs are provided below, but keep your Bibles open during this study in order to refer to the entire passage surrounding these texts. Context is always important in understanding a passage.

- 1 Corinthians 11:3: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head (*kephalē*) of every man, and the husband is the head (*kephalē*) of his wife, and God is the head (*kephalē*) of Christ."
- Ephesians 1:22: "And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head (*kephalē*) over all things for the church."
- Ephesians 4:15: "But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head (*kephalē*), into Christ."
- Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is the head (*kephalē*) of the wife just as Christ is the head (*kephalē*) of the church, the body of which he is the Savior."
- Colossians 1:18: "He is the head (*kephalē*) of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything."
- Colossians 2:10: "And you have come to fullness in him, who is the head (*kephalē*) of every ruler and authority."
- Colossians 2:19: "And not holding fast to the head (*kephalē*), from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God."

At Issue

There are several key questions in the debate about *kephalē*, especially as it is used in Ephesians 5:23.

- 1) What does *kephalē* mean in Greek? Simply stated, most traditionalists contend that *kephalē* means authority (to rule over),¹ while many egalitarians contend it does not. On the other hand, some egalitarians argue that it primarily means “source” or “origin,”² while some traditionalists contend that it does not.
- 2) What was Paul trying to say when he used *kephalē*? This question sometimes gets ignored in the argument over what the actual uses of the word were in the Greek literature of that time. When this question is ignored, we lose sight of the fact that Paul was pointing to a new understanding of marriage and a new model of leadership for Christians.
- 3) What is the best English word for *kephalē*? Some egalitarians argue that the English word “head” has connotations that the Greek word doesn’t have and that Paul didn’t intend, most notably the idea of “authority over.”³

Let’s try to wade through these questions. Many scholars note that the literal meaning of *kephalē* is the physical “head,” a meaning that frequently includes the idea of a “physical extremity.” But, translating *kephalē* as the English word “head” often misleads people into thinking that it means control. As Klyne Snodgrass says, “Many have assumed that *kephalē* means ‘boss,’ ‘person in charge,’ or ‘leader,’ since the word has those metaphorical meanings in English.”⁴ We in the modern Western world understand that the brain controls the body, so it is hard for us to separate the idea of “control” from of the word “head.” But the Greeks did not have the same understanding of physiology that we have. According to Faith Martin, “They believed that the heart was the seat of the intellect and the head was the source of life and life fluids. . . . Accordingly, when Zeus gave birth to [Athena, she] sprang from his head.”⁵

Difficulties in understanding this word arise because of Western connotations for the English word “head.” It is hard to avoid eisegesis here;

that is, reading back into the text our own interpretations based on our own perspective or cultural understanding. So, while it isn't wrong to render *kephalē* as "head" in English, the result is that English readers are prone to understand "head" as authority or dominant position, even though in Greek texts, *kephalē* was not typically used to describe the relationships of individuals to one another, and especially not superior/subordinate relationships. The challenge, therefore, is to let go of our own cultural understandings of the word "head" so that we can open ourselves to the meaning of *kephalē* as situated in this text.⁶

Beyond the more literal meaning of "head" mentioned above, *kephalē*, at the time Paul wrote these passages, was used metaphorically in a variety of other ways. Discerning Paul's metaphorical meaning is the real challenge. Kenneth Neller notes that, "In extra-biblical Greek literature, *kephalē* (head) refers primarily to what is first or supreme, or to an extremity, end, or point. As such, the term was used to designate not only the head of a person or animal, but also the prow of a ship, head of a pillar, top of a wall, source or mouth of a river, or start of a period of time. The word could also signify what was prominent, outstanding, or determinative."⁷ Other scholars agree with Neller, preferring "preeminence."⁸

Some traditionalists, such as Wayne Grudem, argue that "the evidence

"THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE lexicon of the Greek language of that period available in English is one compiled by Liddell, Scott, Jones, McKenzie that covers classical and *koine* Greek from 1000 B.C. to about 600 A.D. The lexicon lists about 25 possible figurative meanings of head that were used in Greek literature. The list does *not* include our common English usage of head as 'authority over,' 'boss,' 'superior rank,' or anything similar to that idea. Instead the lexicon includes figurative meanings such as top or extremity of such things as a vessel, a wall, a capital of a column; the source or mouth or origin of something (we still use that idea in 'headwaters of a river'), the crown or completion or consummation of something; sometimes head stands for the whole person."

A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, *Studies on Biblical Equality* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality), 26.

to support the claim that *kephalē* means ‘source’ is surprisingly weak, and, in fact, unpersuasive,”⁹ and “the evidence to support the claim that *kephalē* can mean ‘authority over’ is substantial.”¹⁰ Egalitarians and other scholars, however, strongly disagree and point out that the Liddell-Scott Lexicon omits the meaning of “authority over” as one of the metaphorical meanings of *kephalē* (see sidebar on previous page).¹¹

The meaning of *kephalē* as “source of life” or “preeminence” can be most clearly understood in the passages above that refer to Christ (Colossians 1:18; 2:19; Ephesians 4:15). Yet, in Colossians 2:10, it would be hard to imagine that *kephalē* means that Christ is the “source” of the principalities and powers.¹²

The Septuagint is another important source of information about how *kephalē* was used. The Septuagint is the name of the Old Testament that was translated from Hebrew into Greek. The Hebrew word *ro’sh*, which usually means the physical head of a person or animal, is also used, like in English, as a metaphor to indicate a leader or a person in authority. And yet, the Hebrew-Greek scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek didn’t always use *kephalē* when the meaning was “commander,” “leader,” or “ruler.” They frequently used the Greek work *archon* instead. This is not to say they didn’t use *kephalē* at all. They used a variety of other Greek words (at least twelve¹³) to translate *ro’sh*, including *kephalē*, especially when “head” was a metaphor for “top” or “crown” or in a head-tail metaphor—but not typically as ruler.

Several scholars develop the claim that the metaphorical sense of *kephalē* in Ephesians 5:23 is best understood as referring to or underscoring the *unity* of the head and body, and the resulting natural inclination of an organic whole to work to preserve itself, and to provide nourishment and care, even to the point of death (“as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” v. 25).¹⁴ Similarly, others suggest that *kephalē* is best rendered as “enabler” in this context, or “one who brings to completion.”¹⁵

Other scholars point out that understanding *kephalē* doesn’t ultimately depend on looking at previous usage of the word or extra-biblical texts; rather much of its meaning can be—and should be—understood by studying how it is used in its context.¹⁶ As a result, both Neller and Snodgrass argue that

kephalē, while it frequently can mean “ruler” or to hold “authority over,” probably doesn’t mean that in Ephesians 5:23, but rather suggests “responsibility for,”¹⁷ with an emphasis on the “self-giving love of both Christ and the husband.”¹⁸

Conclusion

An examination of word meanings and origins can seem tedious and difficult. The details of the preceding discussion may leave us a little confused, but one thing should stand out clearly: there are definitely different interpretations of what *kephalē* means and different ideas of how it should be translated. So how do laypersons with no background in biblical languages make a decision about which one is right? How can we arrive at some closure for ourselves in this inconclusive debate?

Continued prayerful study is always a good course of action. In addition, when you are confronted with a case of ambiguous meaning, or more than one meaning, remember this principle of interpretation: in the case of more than one meaning for a word, it is always best to determine the meaning from within the text, and not force a meaning on it from outside of the text.

By applying this principle, one realizes that while *kephalē* may sometimes mean “authority over,” or “rule over,” it is probably not the best way to understand or translate *kephalē* in Ephesians 5:23 because it is not consistent with the profound truth that Paul is trying to teach in Ephesians 5:21 of mutual submission. In addition, we can probably also safely conclude that the English word “head,” while literally accurate, may mislead with its connotations of dominance.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Try reading Ephesians 5:23 substituting all the different meanings of *kephalē* presented in this session. This will help you understand the wide range of possibilities, and why there is debate. Now, reading it in the context of Ephesians 5:21-33, what do you think was Paul's intent and what might be the best translation of the word?

- 2) What do you think was the impact of the message of Ephesians 5:21-33 on the men and women in the church in Ephesus?
✂ You may wish to do some background research in order to enhance this discussion.

- 3) How does an understanding of the debate over *kephalē*, even though these passages refer to a marriage relationship, add to our understanding about women in ministry? Should it?
✂ A possible answer is that some have drawn the conclusion that since the woman is supposed to be subordinate in marriage, she can't have authority in church. A clearer understanding of the mutual submission of marriage, while it might not lead one to conclude anything about a woman's position at church, at least obviates the argument that she can't hold leadership positions.

In Preparation for Next Week

Read Acts 2:17; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; and 14:26-40.

Endnotes

1. See Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): A Response to Recent Studies” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. W. Grudem and J. Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 425-68, and James Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981).

2. See, for example, the writings by Mickelsen and Mickelsen; Bilezikian; Kroeger; Fee; and Besançon Spencer, as mentioned in the Recommended Reading section at the end of this book.

3. A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, *Studies on Biblical Equality* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality), 28.

4. Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 294-295.

5. Faith Martin, *Call Me Blessed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 169.

6. Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 2000), 123.

7. Kenneth V. Neller, “‘Submission’ in Eph. 5:21-33,” in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), 253.

8. See Richard Cervin, “Does *Kephalē* Mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature? A Rebuttal,” *Trinity Journal* (1989): 112, and Belleville, 123.

9. Grudem, 424.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Grudem dismisses this fact by saying that it “is an oversight that should be corrected” (p. 425).

12. Snodgrass, 295.

13. See list in Mickelsen and Mickelsen, 30.

14. See Belleville, 125; Neller, 256; and Joe E. Trull, “Is the Head of the House at Home?” *Priscilla Papers*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Summer 2000.

15. Mickelsen and Mickelsen, 35.

16. See Neller and Snodgrass.

17. Snodgrass, 295.

18. *Ibid.*

SESSION SIX

Paul's Instructions for the Church in Corinth

The goal of this session is to present an overview of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, to discuss whether or not these instructions really forbid women from speaking in the church, and to arrive at a biblically sound understanding of this passage.

In Preparation Read

- Acts 2:17
- 1 Corinthians 11:2-16
- 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

Background

As always, it is important to examine the context of the passages in question. Paul wrote these passages as a part of a letter to the Corinthians in approximately AD 54-55. The Corinthians were the people in Corinth who had converted to Christianity and were meeting together as a church.

Since Christianity was relatively new, its worship formats were not well established. The Corinthians did not have hundreds of years of church history to draw from as far as what worked or didn't work for congregational worship.

These Christian believers were, in fact, worshiping together in an entirely new way. Formerly, religious worship, whether Jewish or otherwise, was characterized by officials or priests, whose official duty was to control and lead worship. In the new Christian church, all believers participated as led by the Spirit and according to their gifts, and it appears that this was frequently done without having a formal leader. This passage indicates that these believers came together to share what the Holy Spirit had given them, each one having received a spiritual gift intended to help the church grow and function well together.

Unfortunately, in their exuberance to speak and share these gifts, their congregational meetings had become quite disorderly. This is the background of the church to which Paul was writing, and Paul understood that background. We, too, must understand this context in order to understand what Paul was saying.

Difficulties and Contradictions

Does this text really restrict women from speaking? If you simply read the clear meaning of the words in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, the answer to that question would be “yes.” But a “yes” answer raises other problems that would then need to be solved.

“THE WORD *phimoō* indicates a forced silence, i.e., when Jesus stilled the raging sea, quieted the unclean spirit, and silenced the Pharisees.... *Hesuchia* is used for silence when the women were to learn in quietness—with a quiet and receptive spirit (1 Timothy 2:11-12)... But in this passage, Paul uses *sigāō*. It is the word used when the disciples decided to remain silent about the transfiguration (Luke 9:36) and when Jesus said that if the disciples were silent (*sigāō*) the very stones would cry out. It is the word used for Jesus’ silence during his trial (Mark 14:61) and the silence of the apostles and elders as they listened to a report by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12). It is a chosen response—or it can also be a request for silence so that someone can speak (Acts 12:17). It is the kind of silence called for in the midst of disorder and tumult.”

John Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 62-63.

Understanding whether Paul meant to permanently restrict women from speaking in church for all time is an important exegetical and theological challenge. Marilyn Smith explains why:

The central issue is whether the restrictions here contradict the privilege Paul gives to women to pray and prophesy publicly in 1 Corinthians 11. Three options are available and we need to choose what we will believe:

- 1) It is a misunderstanding that Acts 2:17 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 [and 14:39] permit women to prophesy in the church;
- 2) It is a misunderstanding that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 forbids all vocal, audible participation in the church by women; or
- 3) Paul contradicts himself.¹

✘ *Discussion question 1 refers to the above section.*

Scholars offer a variety of explanations for these difficulties and apparent contradictions,² including ideas such as:

- Paul did not write the verses and they were inserted later. There is some support for this argument, but most scholars conclude that these verses are authentic Pauline texts.³
- Paul is quoting the Corinthian view in verses 34 and 35 in order to refute it. In other words Paul is saying, “What? Women should remain silent in the church!? May it never be—I didn’t teach you that.” While this view is gaining popularity, some refute it.⁴
- Paul is referring to two different types of gatherings in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Corinthians 11. If the gathering was in the home, for example, women could pray and prophesy (11:5), but not when they are in church. This solution presents innumerable difficulties since most of the early churches were public gatherings in homes, and it is very likely that the gathering Paul referred to in 11:3-16 was indeed the public type.⁵

What Does Paul Really Teach?

- Some believe that Paul's injunction in 14:34-35 was only against married women in the church, and that Paul considered unmarried women better candidates for holy participation in worship. This flies in the face of cultural norms of the day, however, in which there were more restrictions against unmarried women than married.⁶

✂ *Discussion questions 2-8 refers to the above section.*

What Did Paul Really Mean?

Taking Paul's instructions in the context in which they were given, which was clearly about order during the worship service, it seems that he must be asking women to not converse⁷ during the service—that is, to voluntarily quiet themselves; to not keep chatting and asking questions. Paul's injunction is against the noise and the disorder, just as it was for those who were speaking in tongues and prophesying in a noisy, disorderly way, regardless of whether they were men or women. And notice that while “not conversing” during the service is an appropriate principle for orderly worship, it addressed a particular problem in the Corinthian church.

So, going back to the original problem of the questions posed earlier by Marilyn Smith, the most probable conclusion is that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 does not forbid all vocal, audible participation in the church by women for all time.

Conclusion

These verses pose a great number of difficulties with which scholars continue to wrestle. As we try to discern the intent of Paul's instructions, the conclusion that seems most consistent with the rest of his teaching is that this prohibition was against talking during the service, and specifically addressed a problem in the Corinthian church. To make the claim that it literally prohibits women from making any audible sounds in the church raises more difficulties and is inconsistent with the rest of Paul's teaching.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Which of the three options posed by Marilyn Smith (page 59 in the facilitator's version and 49 in the student's version) do you think best explains the difficulties of Paul's instructions? Why?

- 2) Look at 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 again. In this passage, Paul talks about how women and men should prophesy and pray. Discuss whether or not Paul would have written these instructions or not if he were planning to forbid women from prophesying and praying in the church.

- 3) Let's take a closer look at some of these apparent contradictions. Look again at 1 Corinthians 14:26-40. Which subgroups of people was Paul addressing within the Corinthian church?
✘ In verses 27-28, he addresses those who speak in tongues. In verses 29-32, he addresses those who prophesy. In verses 34-35, he addresses women.

- 4) Next, what instructions did he give to those who speak in tongues? Did his instruction apply to both men and women?
*✘ "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let them be silent in church..." (vv. 27-28, the Greek word used here is *sigāō*).*

What Does Paul Really Teach?

- 5) What instructions did he give to those who prophesy? Did his instruction apply to both men and women?

✠ *“Let two or three prophets speak. . . . If a revelation is made to someone else sitting nearby, let the first person be silent (sigaō). For you call all prophesy one by one” (vv. 29-31).*

- 6) What instructions did he give to women?

✠ *“Women were to remain silent (sigaō) in the churches and ask their questions at home (see vv. 34-35).*

- 7) It is not evident from the English translations, but Paul used the same Greek word (*sigaō*) in the instructions to all three groups. *Sigaō* signifies a voluntary silence. (For more details, see the sidebar on page 58 in the facilitator’s version and page 48 in the student’s version.) Is there anything significant about the fact that the word signifies a voluntary silence?

- 8) Look at 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 again. Taking these verses literally leads us to a series of important questions: How can a woman worship in silence? How can she sing, pray, praise God, give testimony, or make a prayer request? What would be the point of women assembling to worship if they must be silent and can't worship?

✠ *While there can be silence in worship, worship calls forth our joyous audible declarations of God's goodness, whether in the form of song, praise, prayer, or testimony.*

✠ Suggestions for Activities

Once you get the group going on the following exercise, stop functioning as leader, so the group gets to experience the sensation of making communal decisions without a leader.

Instruct the group to imagine that your study group is the early church in Corinthians. What would it have been like to worship without an official leader? Discuss which gifts each one of you would bring to your meetings (these can be your actual spiritual gifts or you can select a gift for this exercise). How would you create order without a leader? How do you determine who gets to go next in speaking? How are you going to handle those whose gifts are speaking in tongues, whose gift seems to appear spontaneously, and who tend to speak while others are speaking? How are you going to make decisions?

In Preparation for Next Week

Read 1 Timothy 2:8-15. Look up the passage in different translations. Write verses 11 and 12 down from as many translations as you have available. Bring them to the group study.

Endnotes

1. Marilyn B. Smith, *Gender or Giftedness* (World Evangelical Fellowship Commission on Women's Concerns, 2000), 33.

2. Sandford D. Hull, "Appendix II: Exegetical Difficulties in the 'Hard Passages'" in *Equal to Serve* by Gretchen Gaebelein Hull (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 251-266.

3. For a review of these arguments, see Hull, 266, referencing C.K. Barrett *The First Epistle to Corinthians*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1993. See also Andrew Perriman, *Speaking of Women* (London: Apollos, 1998), 104-105.

4. D. A. Carson, "'Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, J. Piper and W. Grudem eds. (Wheaton: Crossway), 151.

5. Perriman, 109.

6. Ibid, 110-111.

7. Smith, 35.

SESSION SEVEN

Paul's Instructions for the Church in Ephesus

The goal of this session is to present an overview of Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. This passage is frequently used to prevent women from taking any position in a church that would be perceived as "exercising authority over" any man. The goal of this session is to examine this passage and to show that Paul probably did not intend to universally prohibit women from ministry roles within the church, but that his instructions were most likely tied to the cultural problems of the church that Timothy was pastoring.

In Preparation Read

- 1 Timothy 2:8-15
- Look up the passage in different translations. Write verses 11 and 12 down from as many translations as you have available.

Background

As always, we need to begin by examining the context of these verses. Timothy was a young pastor in the church at Ephesus, a church that Paul had started. Paul was his mentor and called Timothy "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). Paul, traveling in Macedonia, sent letters of instruc-

tion and encouragement to Timothy in order to continue the mentoring relationship.

In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul explicitly states why he wrote this letter: “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, if I am delayed, *you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth” (italics added).

The Ephesian church was, like any church, influenced by its surrounding culture. The word “syncretism” applies well here: the blending of pagan and Christian ideas into a new form of religion or worship practice. The two main problems confronting the church at Ephesus were false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-20) and lifestyle issues (1 Timothy 2:8-15), both of which were directly related to the surrounding culture.¹

The problem of immorality was caused by men who used prayer as a pretext to quarrel and show their anger against others. They were praying with impure motives. In addition, women were coming to church dressed in a way that indicated or implied an immoral lifestyle—or at least a misguided and culturally disrespectful approach to life and morality. These women were likely converts to Christianity, and may not have received instruction about their clothing and the fact that it sent the wrong message about Christianity. They may or may not have been still engaged in an immoral lifestyle, but their clothes communicated that they were. Or, perhaps these women, with their newfound freedom in Christ, were throwing off traditional cultural restraints regarding their dress and hairstyles. Paul was addressing these problems when he wrote to Timothy.

At Issue

Similar to the passage in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 that we studied in the previous session, the words in English translations of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 seem unambiguous: Paul does not allow women to teach, to exercise authority over men, and that they must remain silent. However, reading it that way creates many problems and presupposes conclusions to which the text may not point.

First, as with the 1 Corinthians passage, to read 1 Timothy 2:8-15 as

not allowing women to teach or exercise authority over men is to read it in a way that is not consistent with Paul's other teachings and actual practice in regard to women in the church. Second, the actual meanings of the words are also problematic. A quick review of the various translations reveals a wide variety of understandings about how to best translate this passage.

Scholars point out that there are many interpretive problems associated with the Greek text of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, which makes this a problematic passage on many levels. "The number of interpretive decisions that have to be made [regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15] is quite overwhelming. Few laypeople today are aware of this unless their translation alerts them via footnotes. Unfortunately, very few translations do this."² See, for example, the list in the sidebar below.

One of the major issues is the Greek word *authentēin*, which is most frequently translated "to have authority over." Why is this a problem? Because

SANFORD D. HULL lists some of the exegetical difficulties associated with 1 Timothy 2:8-15. He lists several competing or alternative views to each one of the following questions, a fact that demonstrates the difficulty of this passage.

- 1) Where does the paragraph begin?
- 2) What does Paul mean in verse 8 by "holy hands"?
- 3) What is the meaning of *dialogismou* ("argument" in NRSV, "disputing" in TNIV) in verse 8?
- 4) What is the connection between verses 8 and 9?
- 5) Is Paul referring in verses 11 and 12 to wives or women in general?
- 6) What does the word *hēsuchia* ("silence" in NRSV, "quietness" in TNIV) signify in verse 11?
- 7) To whom or what does verse 11 tell women/wives to submit?
- 8) What is the force of *ouk epitrepō* ("I permit no" in NRSV, "I do not permit" in TNIV) in verse 12?
- 9) What does Paul mean in verse 12 by "teach" (*didaskein*)?
- 10) What is the precise meaning of *authentēin* ("have authority" in NRSV, "assume authority" in TNIV) in verse 12?
- 11) Is "a man" the object of "to teach" as well as "to have authority over"?

Continued on following page.

What Does Paul Really Teach?

Continued from previous page.

- 12) Is Paul prohibiting one or two things in verse 12?
- 13) What is the place of verses 13-14 in Paul's argument?
- 14) What is the force of the preposition *gar* ("for" in NRSV and TNIV) in verse 13?
- 15) What is the point of verse 13?
- 16) What kind of formation does *eplasthē* ("was formed" in NRSV and TNIV) signify in verse 13?
- 17) What is the point of verse 14?
- 18) What does verse 15 mean?
- 19) What does the verb *sōzō* ("save") mean in this context?
- 20) What is the force of the preposition *dia* ("through" in NRSV and TNIV) in verse 15?
- 21) What is the meaning of *teknogonia* ("childbearing" in NRSV and TNIV)?
- 22) What is the force of the definite article *tēs* ("the"), which precedes *teknogonia* in the Greek text?
- 23) Why is the verb "reman" (*meinōsin*) plural in verse 15?
- 24) Where does the paragraph end?
- 25) What problem is Paul addressing in this passage?

Taken from Sandford D. Hull's, "Appendix II: Exegetical Difficulties in the 'Hard Passages'" in *Equal to Serve* by Gretchen Gaebelien Hull (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 259-265.

authentēin appears nowhere else in the Bible, and is also rare in secular Greek literature,³ which means there is no agreement on its actual meaning. (The Greek word used elsewhere in the New Testament for "authority" is *exousia*.) Consequently, it is highly debated as to what it really does mean, although many suggest that "to domineer" may be the best way of understanding it. But even that brings up other questions: for example, is it always thoroughly negative, or only when women do it?

Learn to Learn

One of the easiest points to agree on is that this passage teaches that women should learn. As Marilyn Smith says, "The message is that women need to learn because lack of learning leads to deception. Anyone who has

not been taught can be deceived and anyone who is easily deceived certainly should not teach.”⁴ While Paul's assertion that “women should learn” hardly seems notable to us, it is striking when considered in light of the cultural context. Remember, Paul was writing at a time when women were not usually educated at all. Ancient Mediterranean (Jewish and Greek) customs separating women from the public sphere made it difficult for women to learn.⁵ As John Temple Bristow explains, Paul's teaching here was “both radical in thought and difficult in execution.”⁶ It appears that Paul wanted women to *learn to learn*—that is, because women weren't accustomed to learning, they needed to learn to be quiet and submissive while receiving instruction rather than being argumentative or disruptive. It appears that the primary problem with which Paul was concerned was the false teaching that had crept into the church. As a consequence of this concern, Paul didn't want women to teach *until* they had learned first.⁷

Aida Besançon Spencer makes the point that “Paul's exhortations contradicted the first-century Jewish practices which did not encourage women to become educated because then their homemaking would take a lower priority. Rather, Paul was equalizing the relationship between men and women. The women, as the men, were to learn. The men, as the women, were to be concerned for their children (1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12; 5:14; Titus 1:6; 2:4).”⁸

Understanding *Authentein*

In the sentence, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12), Paul didn't use *exousia*, the Greek word that is usually used in the New Testament to mean “authority.” He used *authentein* instead. This makes understanding the text problematic, because, as mentioned above, the word is very unusual in Greek and not used anywhere else in the Bible. This fact indicates that it had a meaning different from *exousia* and that Paul was focusing attention on that unique usage.

While there is no universal consensus on the meaning of *authentein*, many scholars believe that translating it as “to domineer,” may be the closest match in meaning,⁹ and there is indication that the word has strongly negative connotations. In other words, it didn't merely mean “to have authority

over” (*exousia*)—rather, it implied something more vicious. For example, according to Spencer, “In contemporary Greek society, [*authentēin*] signifies ‘to commit a murder,’ ‘to kill with one’s own hand either others or one-self.’ . . . Thus *authentēin* signifies ‘to domineer’ or ‘to have absolute power over’ persons in such a way as to destroy them.”¹⁰

To get an idea of how complex the alternatives are in interpreting *authentēin* in this passage, see Andrew Perriman’s lengthy and worthwhile discussion.¹¹ Perriman concludes that “Paul’s overriding concern in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is to ensure that women in the church are not led astray by false teachers, that they learn in submission to the authority of God’s Word, and, somewhat incidentally, that they should not be put in a position where they might mislead others.”¹²

Just as Jesus negated traditional, domineering ideas about leadership and promoted a servant-like leadership style instead, so Paul seems to be doing the same thing here. While Paul is concerned about women *domineering* men in this passage, he certainly is not teaching the converse: that men should *domineer* over women. “What women are denied in v. 12, especially if the word meant to *domineer* or *usurp authority*—was already explicitly denied to men by Jesus (Mark 10:42-43).”¹³ (See sidebar below.)

For All Times?

As mentioned earlier, for Paul to teach that women are not to be in any position of leadership in the church is inconsistent with Paul’s other teachings and actual practice in regard to women in the church. When understood in light of the cultural context, we learn that Paul was concerned

“SO JESUS CALLED THEM and said to them, ‘You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’” —Mark 10:42-45

about false teachings, which led him to be concerned that a teacher, male or female, *learn first* before becoming a teacher, and in order to do so they had to *learn to learn*. To use these passages to prevent women from holding any leadership positions in the church for all times is to apply these verses literally, while selectively ignoring the passages that teach something different.¹⁴ That is not an honest interpretive practice.

“FOR IN CHRIST JESUS you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
—Galatians 3:26-28

Conclusion

Paul's bold statement in Galatians 3:26-28 “held the record as the most powerfully egalitarian proclamation in Christianity, Western literature and (probably) world culture. In this verse, Paul directly countered the notion that race, class, or gender had any meaning before God.”¹⁵ The gospel Paul preached was a whole and consistent gospel; therefore, we must seek to harmonize all of Paul's teachings or we run the risk of corrupting the very message Paul tried to preach.

Discussion Questions

- 1) If you could meet the Apostle Paul face to face, what questions would you ask him?

What Does Paul Really Teach?

2) If Paul was concerned that women be taught, what implications does this have for your church?

3) If Paul were to write a letter to your church or your pastor, what issues might he be concerned about? Would those issues be of concern for all churches for all times, or just a concern for your particular church at this particular time?

✂ For example: Your high-school group has a worship service in the room next to the sanctuary at the same time as the regular worship service. They consistently turn up the sound system so loud that it makes it difficult to hear in the main service. Yet, some people are opposed to asking them to turn it down, not wishing to discourage the young people. What might Paul's letter say? Might he not make a reference to volume control? Could future generations argue that he meant to say, "Turn it off," while others argue that he meant to say, "Turn it down," and still others argue that he meant no music at all?

4) Some have accused the Apostle Paul of being a "chauvinist." Do you think he deserves that label?

In Preparation for Next Week

Read Matthew 19:29; 26:6-13; 27:55-56, 61; 28:16-20, Mark 5:21-43; 10:11-12; 15:40-41, 47; Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 22:24-30; 24:10-11; John 4:7-42; 11:2-45; 12:1-8; 13:13-17; 19:25; Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12; 14:31; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 2:3-11; and 1 Peter 5:2-3

Endnotes

1. A. Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, *Studies on Biblical Equality* (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality), 39.
2. Linda Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 2000), 163-165. On these pages, Belleville also lists major interpretive decisions related to this passage.
3. Mickelsen and Mickelsen, 40.
4. Marilyn B. Smith, *Gender or Giftedness* (World Evangelical Fellowship Commission on Women's Concerns, 2000), 40.
5. Smith, 40.
6. John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said about Women* (Harper San Francisco, 1991), 70.
7. Smith, 41.
8. Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 81.
9. Catherine Kroeger and Richard Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).
10. Spencer, 87.
11. Andrew Perriman, *Speaking of Women: Interpreting Paul* (London: Apollos, 1998), 136-173.
12. Ibid, 173.
13. Carrie A. Miles and Laurence R. Iannacone with Linda Ikeda. *Male and Female in Christ* (Carrie A. Miles, 2000), 100.
14. Mickelsen and Mickelsen, 41.
15. Miles, Iannacone, with Ikeda, 66.

UNIT FOUR

A New Vision for Ministry

SESSION EIGHT

The New Testament Model for Ministry

In Session 4, we saw that Jesus approached women in a radical new way. In Sessions 5, 6, and 7, we studied the Pauline passages that frequently get interpreted in a way that restricts women's roles in ministry. Now, in Session 8, we return to the theme that Jesus ushered in a *new* paradigm. Because this is such an important idea, we look again at how Jesus treated women. We also look at two other concepts: the New Testament writers introduced the idea of *mutual submission* and reintroduced the idea of the *priesthood of all believers*, a revolutionary new way of accessing God that was predicted in the Old Testament.

In Preparation Read

- Matthew 19:29; 26:6-13; 27:55-56, 61; 28:16-20
- Mark 5:21-43; 10:11-12; 15:40-41, 47
- Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 22:24-30; 24:10-11
- John 4:7-42; 11:2-45; 12:1-8; 13:13-17; 19:25
- Acts 2:1-21
- 1 Corinthians 12; 14:31
- Galatians 5:13
- Ephesians 4:11-16

- Philippians 2:3-11
- 1 Peter 5:2-3

The Jesus Paradigm and Redemption

Have you ever noticed that Jesus did many of the things that Jewish tradition *prohibited*? For example, he touched lepers, spoke to women, and consorted with tax-gatherers—actions that challenged the prevailing prejudices.¹ That’s one of the reasons that Jesus infuriated the religious leaders of that day. They had worked very hard to achieve “holiness” by not associating with all the supposedly “unclean” people, and then Jesus came along and undid everything they believed in. He showed that holiness, that is, *access to God*, has nothing to do with staying away from other people, or being better than them.

In particular, Jesus saw women as persons of equal worth to men and rejected existing practices that devalued women. This pattern is evident in his teachings (he uses examples of women as well as men) and his actions (in clear violation of Jewish tradition, Jesus invited both men and women to receive theological and spiritual instruction from him).

Jesus also taught and practiced servant leadership and the empowerment of others. According to Jesus, leadership is about servanthood, not authority. Passages in the Gospels such as Luke 22:24-30 and John 13:13-17 record Jesus’ teaching on this subject and show that Jesus ushered in a new paradigm that ran counter to the existing culture of hierarchical systems and authority.

Most importantly, Jesus Christ came to fully redeem all people, women as well as men. Paul emphasizes that *all* who believe in Christ are redeemed from sin and become new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:22). Not only do we who believe become the children of God, and equal heirs, but we also become one in Christ. These blessings come through our faith in Christ, independent of our racial, social, physical, or gender distinctions (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-28).

✦ *Discussion questions 1 and 2 refer to the above section.*

The Great Commission and How We Fulfill It

In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus gives what has become known as the great commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

These verses present the essence of what our purpose, as believers, is during our life on earth. This commission should be our major preoccupation in life. But how do we carry it out? It is too huge a task for any one individual. Obviously, we must work together in order to accomplish the great commission. How do we do that?

Jesus gave the Nike™ command (“Just do it.”) and the remainder of the New Testament provides more information about *how* we are to do it. In order to carry out the great commission, we, as individuals, need encouragement, teaching, and loving support from other believers. The New Testament provides a model for how we are to do this—how we, as believers, should gather together for fellowship. In order to carry out the great commission, we also need special abilities—abilities that the Bible calls spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to serve others, to build the body of Christ, and to fulfill the great commission (see 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 2:3-11; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

We get these abilities through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled both women and men alike, with no distinction made on any basis. As we read the verses about this event (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; 14:31), it is clear that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts without regard to what the world would do. If you recall from Session 4, women, having received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, were involved in all ministry positions and activities, including apostles (Romans 16:7); prophetic speaking (Acts 1:14; 2:15-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5,10); serving as ministers, leaders, elders or governors (Romans 16:1); coworkers (Philippians 4:2-3; Romans 16:3-5; Acts 18:2, 18-19); and gifted teachers who instructed men (Acts 18:24-26).

✦ *Discussion questions 3-6 refer to the above section.*

Mutuality

As we look at the New Testament model for the church, it is clear that God intended us to live in community. This is a profound statement when we contrast real community with the traits of individualism and independence that dominate our culture. True community can only happen when the individuals involved start eradicating the things that separate them from each other.

Paul's teaching, in Ephesians 5:21, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," is just one example of a revolutionary new understanding of what life in the Spirit means for Christians. As Klyne Snodgrass points out,

It is important to note that this text does not ask some Christians to submit to other Christians. It asks *all* Christians to submit *to each other*. No privileged group is in view. Submission is a crucial ingredient in Christian living (this theme is central in 1 Peter). Christians in Corinth were asked to submit to workers who had made themselves servants to the church (1 Corinthians 16:16)—they were to submit to servants! Prophets were to submit to other prophets to whom revelation came (14:32). Submission was so important for New Testament writers because it described the self-giving love, humility, and willingness to die that are demanded of all Christians. For example, in Philippians 2:3, Paul rejects selfishness and asks that in humility people consider others as "surpassing" themselves. In the verses that follow he shows how Christ himself modeled such a life (cf. Rom. 12:3; Gal. 5:13)... Christians are called to live in mutual submission and *without mutual submission they cannot fulfill their destiny*.²

Both Paul and Peter implore believers to *submit* to one another—that is, mutual submission. That's a radical idea! What did they mean? Patricia Gundry notes that, "Mutual submission is a way of living, an attitude toward others. It is something one does because one wants to, not because one has to.... [Ephesians 5:21] steps out to meet us with this curious gentle

suggestion on how we can relate to each other in a ‘filled-with-the Spirit’ way—by submitting ourselves to one another in the fear of God.”³ Gundry also emphasizes that this idea of mutual submission “was a *principle* given to guide relationships between all believers. The verses following verse 21 tell how to work it out in three of the most unequal relationships in the society of that day.”⁴

✠ *Discussion questions 7-10 refer to the above section.*

The Priesthood of All Believers

God told Moses that the Israelites “shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). Old Testament prophets predicted a time when “You shall be called priests of the LORD, you shall be named ministers of our God” (Isaiah 61:6), and a time when God’s Spirit would be poured out on all believers, both young and old, men and women (Joel 2:28-29).

In the New Testament, Peter wrote “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). He also wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

This idea that believers are priests is confirmed again in Revelation, where it is repeatedly declared that *all* those who believe in Christ will be priests: “To him who . . . made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father” (1:5-6); “you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God” (5:10); and “they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him a thousand years” (20:6).

The nouns and pronouns in all these verses are all inclusive. In other words, there is no grammatical indication that this priesthood would be male only, or only from the tribe of Levites. These nouns and pronouns refer to all God’s people!

✠ *Discussion questions 11-14 refer to the above section.*

Conclusion

Being called to mutual submission and being taught to live in community, to abandon divisions and status and hierarchy, is as radical today as it was when first-century Christians were beginning to worship together as a church. It's no wonder they needed so many letters of encouragement and correction. It is too easy to go back to the world's way of thinking that someone has to be in charge, and to create new hierarchies. The egalitarian position is firmly rooted in the "new" paradigm—the Jesus paradigm of redemption, and the paradigm of letting people serve according to their gifts, not their gender or status; the paradigm in which all God's people are priests.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What are the qualities of a leader? What does "leadership" mean? What does "servant leadership" mean?
- 2) What is the relationship between authority and leadership?
✠ Marilyn Smith, in her book Gender or Giftedness, provides the succinct reply: "...equipping...whether it be in the area of leadership, teaching, or ministry will include authority, but it will not be authority 'over' another but the authority 'of' the Word and Spirit of God" (page 42).
- 3) Can you find any evidence in the Bible that the Holy Spirit gives gifts according to our biological sex (i.e., that men get certain gifts and women get other ones)?

- 4) Is there any evidence in the Bible that only men are supposed to carry out the great commission?

✠ See Acts 1:14, 8:4, 21:8-9; Romans 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; 1 Corinthians 12; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:15.

- 5) Read 1 Peter 4:10-11. Are both men and women called to be faithful managers of the gifts that have been freely given to them? Or just men?

- 6) Based on the examples in the preceding paragraphs, what can you conclude about spiritual authority?

✠ We can conclude that spiritual authority comes from God and is not determined by our gender. Authority is a spiritual function not a function based on our physical attributes. The result of ministering to one another according to our spiritual gifts is that the church becomes a true fellowship of believers characterized by mutual participation in and sharing of the new life in Christ.

- 7) Read Acts 2:42-47. Is the church that is described in this passage different from your church? How?

- 8) What types of attitudes, lifestyles, or behaviors separate us or keep us isolated from other people and prevent us from living in real Christian community as the believers described in Acts 2 did?

✂ *There are several things that prevent us from living, working, and worshiping together in real community.*

- *One of those factors is pride—the desire to feel superior or be superior to other people. It is human nature to use any factors at our disposal to distinguish ourselves from others: our wealth, the color of our skin, our biological sex, our education. But Paul made it clear that we are not to make distinctions among ourselves: “For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).*
- *Another factor is our American emphasis on individualism and independence. For example, we hear of many elderly people who don’t want to be a burden on their children. And yet, what does the Bible say about caring for the elderly?*

- 9) Discuss mutual submission. What does it really mean? What does the term “mutuality” mean?

✂ *Marilyn Smith, in her book Gender or Giftedness, defines mutuality as “a state in which feelings, position, or assets are shared equally” (p.84).*

- 10) Does mutual submission seem normal or foreign to you? Can you think of examples in your own life where you live in mutual submission? Can you think of examples in your own life where you *should* do it, but don't? Ask the group for help in discerning how you might apply it to real-life situations with which you are having difficulty. Is mutuality possible? What would it be like to voluntarily submit yourself to another church member? What would it feel like to have someone say, "I submit to you"?
- 11) The verses in Peter address the believers in the New Testament church, as well as all subsequent believers. What does it mean that we are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood"?
- 12) What does this mean for you personally? Have you ever thought of yourself as a priest before?
- 13) How can you apply this concept in your own church?

14) Does understanding that we are all priests put the idea of mutual submission in a new light?

✠ One possible answer is viewing other believers as a royal priesthood helps make the idea of willingly submitting to another believer clearer: we are, in a sense, submitting to another priest. This helps clarify that we are operating under a mysterious new world order ushered in by Christ and not the old order in which we seek power and have trouble submitting to others.

For Reflection

How are you going to move forward in fulfilling the great commission now that you've learned more about how and why God gives gifts to individual believers? How are you going to move forward in mutual submission?

✠ Suggestions for Activities

Ask the participants to relate their experiences of church board or committee meetings that have been conducted in an authoritarian manner and ones that reflected servant leadership and mutuality. Have them elaborate on what those different styles looked like and felt like.

Endnotes

1. This theme is presented in greater depth in the other study guide in this suite called, *All God's People*, by John E. Phelan Jr.
2. Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 292.
3. Patricia Gundry, *Heirs Together* (Suitcase Books, 1993), 94-95.
4. *Ibid*, 95.

SESSION NINE

Applying the Liberating Message of the Gospel in the Local Church

There are many ways to apply the principles of gender equality in the local church. Most denominations have policy statements that either directly address this issue or reveal the denomination's attitude. If you are unfamiliar with your own church or denomination's policy, do a little research to find out more. Many denominations make their policy papers available on their websites.

There are many other resources (see the Recommended Reading list) to help you in your quest to introduce these principles to your local congregation.

The rest of this session, excluding the discussion questions, is excerpted from the booklet *Called and Gifted* and was prepared by the Commission on Biblical Gender Equality of the Evangelical Covenant Church. It is an example of how one denomination has taken a stand on this issue.

What does the Evangelical Covenant Church believe about women in pastoral roles and other ministry and leadership positions within the church?

The Evangelical Covenant Church affirms women in all ministry and leadership positions within the church, both lay and clergy. We believe that

the biblical basis for service in the body of Christ is giftedness, a call from God, and godly character—not gender.

What is the biblical basis for this position?

We believe in the Holy Scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments, as the word of God and the only perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct. Our tradition, therefore, has always been to ask, “Where is it written?” on matters of faith, doctrine, and conduct. Our position on women in ministry flows from our high view of Scripture and is not derived from cultural or societal trends. We believe that “women ought to minister not because society says so but because the Bible leads the Church to such a conclusion.”¹

There are several interpretive frameworks through which people arrive at their conclusions about the subject of women in ministry. This document unpacks the interpretive framework through which the Covenant arrives at its position. We invite those who are in agreement, those who are still searching, and those who disagree to look through the same window with us to see what we see. This document outlines, from creation through redemption, the biblical basis for our position and reflects our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating word.

Creation. From the beginning, the Bible reveals God’s plan for human beings as one of community, unity, equality, and shared responsibility. Both men and women were created in God’s image, and God initiated a relationship with both, without preference for one or the other. In addition, God charged both women and men equally with the blessings and responsibilities of childrearing and dominion over the created order (Genesis 1:26-28; 5:1-2).

The fact that both men and women were created in God’s image is particularly significant. God’s plan for community and unity was based on the equality of the human beings God had created and on their equal participation and full partnership. The Hebrew words *'ezer knegdo* are used as a descriptor for woman in Genesis 2:18. *'Ezer* is frequently translated as “helper,” which some have come to interpret or understand as an inferior or one in a supporting role. Unlike the English word “helper,” the Hebrew

'ezer implies no inferiority; in fact, this word most frequently refers to God in the Old Testament, meaning protector or rescuer.²

Its modifier, *kneqdo*, means “suitable,” “face to face,” “equivalent to,” or “visible,” and indicates that God created an equivalent human being to be a good companion for man. This rules out authority and subordination for either man or woman.

Some would argue that the fact that woman was formed from man creates both preeminence and authority for the man. There is nothing in the text that supports this interpretation. Rather, the text emphasizes that man was incomplete, and God kindly created for him a suitable companion (Genesis 2:21-23). God’s loving act to alleviate man’s loneliness did not produce an inferior being; rather God created an equivalent human, underscoring the unity and equality of all human beings.

Finally, some point out that the Bible frequently refers to God as male. Four points should be made concerning this matter.

- First, the Bible affirms that God is spirit (John 4:24) and has no body or biological sex, as we do.
- Second, while the Bible often refers to God as male, this is the language of comparison, employing simile and metaphor. We should remember that Scripture refers to God as a rock and a fortress (Psalm 31:2-3); Jesus refers to himself as a mother hen (Luke 13:34); and God refers to himself as rot and a festering sore (Hosea 5:12). These are examples of God condescending to explain himself by comparison to forms we can understand. Yet these descriptions do not alter the basic teaching that God is spirit.
- Third, the limits of human language limit our understanding. Most languages do not have a neutral-gender pronoun (e.g., “it”) that can successfully refer to a higher-order animate being (e.g., a human) let alone a deity, even if that deity is perceived to be without biological sex or gender. The lack of appropriate terminology limits our ability to apprehend phenomena that is normally outside the range of human experience. Lacking appropriate pronouns for God, we substitute male pronouns, with the result that they sometimes shape

our perception of God in unintended ways, even while serving to make God more personal.

- Finally, in Jesus, God assumed particularity. That is, Jesus was a male Palestinian Jew. Yet neither his Jewishness nor his maleness is meant to be a standard used to exclude Gentiles or women from full participation in the Christian community. The New Testament affirms that in this particularity Jesus becomes the one for all, the one who draws all to him (John 12:32).³ It was on this issue that Paul opposed Peter (Cephas) at Antioch when Peter withdrew from fellowship with Gentile believers (Galatians 2:11-14). Paul believed that the truth of the gospel is that old distinctions and divisions ought to have no power or efficacy in Christ. The old, said Paul, has passed away. The new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Effects of Sin. Sin entered the world through both the man and the woman. They were co-participants in the fall, and are equally culpable (Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

One of the key results of sin was—and continues to be—the break in unity and fellowship between humans and God, as well as between Adam and Eve. As a result of sin, Adam began to rule over Eve (Genesis 3:16). This hierarchy is an unwanted result of sin and is not God’s prescription. It violates God’s original plan for unity, equality, fellowship, and community. When in discussion with the authorities concerning the law of Moses, Jesus laid down the principle that the standard is the original intention of God found in Genesis 1 and 2 (Matthew 19:3-9).

Another unwelcome result of sin was the corruption of the ensuing culture, which led to hostilities among people and culminated in the oppression and exclusion of those considered to be weaker classes: the poor, the sick, women, the unclean. The Old Testament records these customs, as well as the longing for the day when all creation would be redeemed. The redemption would include the elimination of barriers and reconciliation between former enemies. Isaiah prophesies, “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). The Old

Testament prophets foretold the Messiah as the one who would bring about a feast for all people; would heal the blind, the deaf, and the lame; would proclaim release to the captives and freedom for the oppressed (Isaiah 61). It is significant that Luke 4:16-21 records Jesus quoting this very passage before announcing that in him it is fulfilled.

Additionally, the prophets pointed to a time when “You shall be called priests of the Lord, you shall be named ministers of our God” (Isaiah 61:6), and to a time when God’s Spirit would be poured out on all believers (Joel 2:28-29), both young and old, men and women. This was later confirmed when Peter wrote, “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5), and “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). This is confirmed again in Revelation, where it is repeatedly declared that all those who believe in Christ will be priests: “To him who...made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 1:5-6); “you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God...” (Revelation 5:10); and “...they will be priests of God and of Christ...” (Revelation 20:6).

The hierarchical, divisive, and patriarchal customs that developed are not God’s ideal order. God’s ideal order, plainly stated through the prophecies about the Messiah, is one of healing and reconciliation. God’s ideal order eliminates the effects of sin, including class divisions, hierarchy, and oppression. It restores the original unity, fellowship, and community between God and humans, and between men and women. It re-establishes the God-designed equality of women and men.

The Jesus Paradigm and Redemption. During Christ’s life, he exhibited in his teaching and practices the very qualities that were prophesied: he touched lepers, spoke to women, and consorted with tax-gatherers. By doing so, Jesus modeled the new kingdom and challenged the prevailing sexist and divisive prejudices, tearing down the divisions and restrictions that

had arisen as the result of sin. Jesus saw women as persons of equal worth to men and rejected existing practices that devalued women (see Matthew 19:29; 26:6-13; 27:55-56, 61; Mark 5:21-43; 10:11-12; 15:40-41, 47; Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 24:10-11; John 4:7-42; 11:2-45; 12:1-8; 19:25). This pattern is evident in his teachings (a woman plays the role of God in the parable of the lost coin) and his actions (in clear violation of Jewish tradition, Jesus invited both men and women to receive theological and spiritual instruction from him).

Jesus also taught and practiced servant leadership and the empowerment of others. According to Jesus, leadership is about servanthood, not authority. Passages in the Gospels such as Luke 22:24-30 and John 13:13-17 record Jesus' teaching on this subject and show that Jesus ushered in a paradigm that was counter to the existing culture of hierarchical systems and authority. The remainder of the New Testament continues this teaching of servant leadership, emphasizing that spiritual gifts are given to serve others and build the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 2:3-11; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Most importantly, Jesus Christ came to fully redeem all people, women as well as men. Paul emphasizes that all who believe in Christ are redeemed from sin and become new creations. Not only do we who believe become the children of God, and equal heirs, but we also become one in Christ. These blessings come through our faith in Christ, independent of our racial, social, physical, or gender distinctions (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26-28).

In the world, characteristics such as "maleness" or "femaleness" function as primary markers of personal definition and are used to assign rank, status, and worth. In Christ, we are instead defined by being a new creation in Christ. As a result of becoming a new creation, a believer's primary identity is his or her new life in Christ. Our old identities—those of gender, race, or social class—become secondary to our true identity in Christ. In our culture, like that of Jesus and Paul, maleness and femaleness matter. But our beliefs and practices ought not to be determined by earthly cultures, as our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

The domination of one group by another group is one of the effects of sin

that Jesus came to abolish. In its stead the New Testament affirms Christian community as marked by mutual interdependence, where differences are not to be of any advantage or disadvantage (Galatians 3:28). The result is a new community with new kingdom realities. For believers to continue subordinating other humans is contrary to our new identities in Christ and contrary to the new kingdom community. We can choose to model the coming eschatological community (Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven), or we can choose a hierarchical model conformed to this sinful world.

The New Kingdom and the Church as a Fellowship of Believers. The New Testament gives a model for the fellowship of believers. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled both women and men alike, with no distinction made on any basis. The Holy Spirit is sovereign and distributes gifts without preference and without regard to the strictures of a fallen world (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11; 14:31).

As a result of this unbiased indwelling of the Holy Spirit, women were involved in all ministry positions and activities, including apostles (Romans 16:7); prophetic speaking (Acts 1:14; 2:15-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5, 10); serving as ministers, leaders, elders, or governors (Romans 16:1); coworkers (Philippians 4:2-3; Romans 16:3-5; Acts 18:2, 18-19); and gifted teachers who instructed men (Acts 18:24-26).

The Bible also teaches that after Pentecost, both women and men receive spiritual gifts without regard to their gender, both are called to exercise and develop these spiritual gifts, and both are called to be faithful managers of those gifts that have been freely given to them (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are to use these divine gifts to serve one another without restriction (Acts 1:14, 8:4, 21:8-9; Romans 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; 1 Corinthians 12; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:15).

Based on these examples, we conclude that spiritual authority comes from God and is not determined by our gender. Authority is a spiritual function not a function based on our physical attributes. The result of ministering to one another according to our spiritual gifts is that the church becomes a true fellowship of believers characterized by mutual participation

in and sharing of the new life in Christ.

How does the church understand biblical passages that seem to restrict women's ministry in the church?

There are passages that seem to advocate a restrictive view of women and their place within the Christian community, such as 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-35; and 1 Timothy 2:9-15. To ignore any of the passages relevant to this issue is to damage the integrity of the biblical witness and to abdicate our responsibility to be biblical people. However, these passages, though not entirely clear, must not be interpreted in a way that contradicts the rest of Scripture. Space allows only summary consideration of these texts.⁴

First Corinthians 11:2-16 is among the most obtuse passages in the New Testament, yet its main instructions are sufficiently clear. Paul offers instruction on the decorum of those who pray and prophesy. To “prophesy” in the Bible is to speak God’s word. Most often this takes the form of cogent teaching delivered to the faithful at the behest of the Holy Spirit.⁵ This is the case in 1 Corinthians, where the term “prophecy” is aimed at instruction and exhortation (14:31).

It is worth noting that the New Testament identifies men (Silas in Acts 15:32) and women (the four daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9) with the role of prophet. The combination of “pray” and “prophesy” suggests that Paul is referring to public leadership and instruction of the saints. Paul asserts the clear teaching of “nature” is that women should have their heads covered while men should be bareheaded when praying and prophesying. He then claims that women should have their heads covered because of the angels, and because man is the image of God, while woman is the image of man.

While the meanings of the allusions to nature, angels, and creation are difficult to discern, the central issue in the passage is not. The question is how women should conduct themselves while they pray and prophesy, not whether or not they should pray and prophesy.

Paul’s argument about nature appears not to reference the created order (after all, Genesis 1 asserts that male and female together are the image of God, and as a Jew, Paul was aware of the vow mentioned in Numbers

6:1-7 by which men did not cut their hair but allowed it to grow long), but rather the then common cultural order of Roman civilization. This is confirmed in verse 11 where the “natural” pattern of gender hierarchy is set in contradistinction to the very different pattern of the Christian community in which woman is as essential to man as man is to woman. Similarly, it is possible that the term “angels” is a symbolic reference to local customs and culture (see Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).

Whatever else may be said of this passage, it is clear that Paul believed the Spirit led both women and men to pray and prophesy. The rub, as with the discussion of the Eucharist that follows, is that many in the Corinthian congregation were using the church to pursue their own worldly agenda. They celebrated the Eucharist in emulation of pagan feasts that reinforced social status. Paul claimed this practice indicated they had not understood the leveling effects of the work of Christ: differences exist but are not to be of any advantage or disadvantage in the body of Christ. Socially pretentious women at this time chose to go about in public with their heads uncovered in an attempt to assert social superiority. The point Paul makes here, as with the Eucharist, is that he will not brook efforts at self-glorification that seek to use the Christian community to achieve that end.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Paul writes that women should keep silent in the churches, that they should be submissive, and that if they want to be taught, they should ask their husbands at home. At first blush this seems a rather unbending injunction. However, we must remember that Paul has already argued that women may pray and prophesy (chapter 11). We should also not fail to note that Paul has in view not women generally but wives whose questions about Christian theology and practice have apparently disturbed the worship service. Paul commends their interest but urges them to seek instruction at home.

In what is generally regarded as the most restrictive passage in Paul's letters, 1 Timothy 2:9-15, Paul claims that he permits no woman to teach or to have authority. While this passage frequently is used to support the claim that Paul (or the Bible as a whole) is against women having authority in matters of Christian faith and practice, this can only be maintained if 1 Corinthians and Romans, among other New Testament documents, are

removed from consideration. If Paul did not intend this text as a universal principle for all cultures at all times, then there is no case for restricting women in ministry.

How can this be understood? As always, we must look at the historical context and translation issues. There are several reasonable explanations of this passage that do not lead to the conclusion that Paul restricts women for all time.⁶

First, the word for “authority” (*authentein*) is rare in Greek literature, and often means, “to domineer.” This definition makes more sense in the passage than “authority,” as it explains Paul’s recourse to Genesis: it is not God’s plan for women to domineer men, after all Eve was not created first (1 Timothy 2:13-14). It is significant that Paul does not go on to argue that men, therefore, have the right to domineer women. First Timothy 4:3 and 2 Timothy 3:6-7 indicate certain women in the church at Ephesus had come under the influence of false teaching. In light of the fact that heresy was beginning to appear in the church, Paul may be trying to silence the heresy, not women. For example, his intent may have been to say, “When women are the source of heresy, they are not allowed to teach,” which is no different than his silencing of male heretics in Acts 18. It is possible that Paul is suggesting that these women (i.e., heretical women) should not be allowed to teach and so to domineer/to have authority.

It is also quite possible, even likely, that Paul is employing a poetic device parallel to that used in Matthew 6:20 “where thieves do not break in and steal.” The purpose of the first action is to accomplish the second, that is, one breaks in with the purpose of stealing. Read in this fashion Paul’s intent is to say, “I permit no woman to teach if her aim is to domineer.”

One can conclude that it is possible that in these passages Paul offers injunctions against women in leadership roles within the Christian community. But, if so, they stand in stark contradiction to other clearly authoritative passages where Paul strongly supports, expresses appreciation for, and advocates for women in leadership roles in the church. Since the totality of Scripture must inform our thinking and practice, and since Paul’s thought on women and ministry ought to be consistent throughout his letters, the passages seem to make the most sense when read as suggested

above. To claim that Paul did, indeed, intend to restrict women in ministry for all time and all cultures is to attribute inconsistency to Paul and his teaching, which creates a greater burden of proof than does our conclusion, which is as follows:

Based on our examination of the Scriptures as a whole, we humbly conclude that qualified men and women, whether clergy or lay, are free to exercise their God-given gifts in all ministry and leadership positions in the church. As a result, the Evangelical Covenant Church licenses, commissions, and ordains qualified men and women. We encourage our pastors and congregations to recognize, develop, encourage, and use the spiritual gifts of women and men, clergy or lay, in all areas of service, teaching, and leadership, including preaching and pastoral roles.

Conclusion

We believe that the Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in creation and in redemption, and we affirm women in all roles and ministry positions within the church. We recognize that this document cannot answer all the questions related to this subject, but we hope it will stimulate a desire to learn more. And we hope it will stimulate us to love one another in the midst of our quest to live out the new kingdom realities.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Earlier, we talked about paradigm. On what paradigm is this session (the booklet *Called and Gifted*) based?
✘ It is based on a redemption paradigm and a gift-based model of ministry.
- 2) What does that mean? Is it a valid paradigm?

- 3) How can you apply this document to your church?

- 4) What paradigms do you feel people in your congregation use regarding Bible interpretation? Regarding the issue of women's roles in the church? How easily might they connect with the "redemption" paradigm?

- 5) Where is your church in regard to this issue? What is the range of views held within your church?
✂ On a piece of newsprint you could draw a continuum, with "traditional" written on one end and "egalitarian" on the other. Ask people to note where different groups within the church are, and where the church is overall. For example, within one church, younger people might be in a different place on the continuum than older people, newer people in a different place than long-term members.

- 6) How consistent is your church in living out what you perceive is its belief?

- 7) What are the beliefs, convictions, and experiences that energize your congregation on this issue?

For Reflection

This concludes this study on women's roles in the church. Reflect on what you thought about the subject when you started this study and what you think now. We recommend that you continue the study by going deeper into Jesus' ministry as covered in *All God's People* by John E. Phelan Jr.

Endnotes

1. Robert Johnston, Jean Lambert, David Scholer, and Klyne Snodgrass, *A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry* (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1987).

2. The word 'ezer is used twenty-one times in the Old Testament, and it refers to God fifteen of those times (Exodus 15:2; 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; 1 Kings 7:12; 2 Samuel 22:42; Psalm 9:10; 33:20; 69:6; 89:19-20; and 115:9-11). Because the word 'ezer so frequently refers to God, it could be interpreted as implying a superior status, except that its modifier *knegdo* seems to point to equivalency, not superiority or inferiority. Or, as Andrew Perriman points out, "What the word defines is not essentially the status of the helper (the helper may be either superior or inferior), but the condition of the one in need of help. This is of considerable importance. We cannot conclude from the position of Eve as helper that she was placed under the authority of man" (Andrew C. Perriman, *Speaking of Women: Interpreting Paul* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, London: Apollos, 1998.] p. 179).

3. The Greek word here, commonly translated "all men," is *pantas*, which means simply "all."

4. More full-bodied theological discussions are available elsewhere, in particular the fine articles by Klyne Snodgrass ("Your Slaves—on Account of Jesus': Servant Leadership in the New Testament"), Linda Belleville ("Male and Female Leadership Roles in the New Testament"), and David M. Scholer ("Patterns of Authority in the Early Church") in *Servant Leadership: Authority and Governance in the Evangelical Covenant Church*, v. 1, Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1993. The discussion here is heavily dependent on Linda Belleville's article.

5. Prediction of the future is an important but minor definition of prophecy in the Bible.

6. Please refer to the attached bibliography for a further reading in this area. Much

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scholarship has been done on these passages, and there are many fine books and articles that elaborate on the hermeneutical ambiguities presented by these texts and more fully develop the thoughts presented here. Collectively, they present a compelling case that these texts do not adequately support a traditional hierarchical view of women in ministry.

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