



## Men and Women in Leadership

### Statement Summary and Background

God's intention in creation, restored through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit, is for men and women to reign together, under Him. We together share the image of God, and we together share an assignment from God. That assignment will only be fully and faithfully completed as men and women are both welcomed to serve in the leadership of the Church in such a way as to give witness to the world that, in Christ, all divisions and effects of the curse are removed. When women are not welcomed into leadership in the Church, the Church vastly misses out upon the gifts given them by the Holy Spirit, intended to bless, strengthen, and grow the Church. As we explain, we believe a careful review of Scripture fully supports this claim.

At Gold Avenue Church, we feel very passionately about this not only because it has far reaching implications for our Church, and for the women and girls among us, but also because we have been so deeply blessed by the faithful leadership and gift use of women since our beginning as a mission in 1929. Throughout our history, we have a record of men and women serving together. We celebrate that in 2017, when we formally established as a Christian Reformed Church, we installed a male and female team to serve as co-pastors serving with equal responsibility for preaching and leadership, along with women and men who were installed as elders and deacons. We have consistently had people express their deep gratitude for the way in which men and women model working together in mutual submission, out of reverence for Christ.

### Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

Should we pluck out our eyes and cut off our hands if they cause us to sin (Mt. 5:29-30)? Or was Jesus employing hyperbole to denote the seriousness of sin? Judging by the number of Christians who have both eyes and hands, we've applied principles of biblical interpretation to understand Jesus in a serious yet non-literal manner.

Proper interpretation of any passage of Scripture involves some measure of examining it grammatically, literarily, historically, and biblically/theologically. Analyzing words used, sentence structure and verb tense partnered with an understanding of the type of literature (wisdom or prophetic; epistle or apocalyptic, etc.) and an exploration of historical context (What is happening in the city or region at the time this letter was written) go a long way to helping us understand what is meant by a particular passage.

However, the greatest key to properly interpreting and applying Scripture is understanding that Scripture interprets Scripture. The Holy Spirit, who is the author of Scripture, cannot differ with Himself. Therefore, any possible conclusions reached about

the meaning of a particular passage of Scripture need to be shaped by what the whole of Scripture teaches about that subject. This is sometimes called the analogy of Scripture because Scripture is analogous to, or consistent with itself. Proper interpretation requires reading all of what Scripture says about a subject in light of everything else it says about that same subject.

This is especially true when considering the relationship of men and women, and in particular the role of women within the leadership of the body of Jesus Christ. This is an issue of great importance, and has often been muddled by a failure to read and interpret several passages within the letters of Paul in light of the whole of Scripture. These passages are 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

This concise position statement about men and women in ministry will offer a brief overview of what the Scripture teaches concerning God's created intentions for the relationship between men and women, including several comments about the specific relationship of marriage. It will offer interpretations of the two Pauline passages that are consistent with what the rest of Scripture teaches. Finally, it will offer concluding comments about women in ministry. As a position statement, it will not dig deep into exegesis, but will offer summary conclusions from the study of Scripture, and will share resources for further study.

## Creation: The Big Picture

As God nears the high point of creation, Genesis 1:26-28 records God fashioning humankind in his very own image, blessing them, commanding their fruitfulness and delegating authority so that they may "fill the earth and subdue it." At the center of the account of God creating humankind, we read:

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it.'" (Genesis 1:27-28)

The importance of God's intentions in creation cannot be overstated. Here, we see God pronouncing a shared blessing, and giving men and women a shared mandate to be fruitful and increase, to fill the earth and subdue it. In creation, we see no allusion to hierarchy or assignment differentiation as men and women are both assigned to share the image of and fulfill an assignment from God. *They are to reign together, under Him.*

## Fall: Sin's Distorting Effects

The fact that Genesis 2 describes Eve's creation as subsequent to Adam's, and her role as a "helper" in no way denigrates the equality bound up in the shared assignment of Genesis 1. Since the term "helper" is one that Scripture later, and on many occasions, uses to describe God's role in the life of a believer (ie. Psalms 46:1 or 54:4), it should be read as an honorable and high calling, one that in no way denotes subservience. It is only after sin enters the world in Genesis 3 that we see God pronouncing painful consequences of that sin which include a prophecy of husbands ruling over their wives. (Gen. 3:16) Inequality in

the form of domineering or disrespectful leadership that maligns wives (and women in general), robbing them of an equal place in sharing both God's image and God's assignment, is a consequence of the fall.

## Redemption: Restoring God's Intentions

As God works to overcome the results of the fall, we see a welcome and elevation of women in the ministry of Jesus that is startling because of its context. In an era when women were treated as second-class citizens, subordinate to men and unwelcomed to learn from any respectable rabbi, Jesus' actions were revolutionary.

Unlike his contemporaries, Jesus welcomed women as his followers and students, applauding their learning (Luke 10:38-42), and lifting up all those who "hear the Word of God and do it," (men or women) as his brothers and sisters (Luke 8:21).

By his speech and actions, Jesus consistently lifted women up, demonstrating a value for them that was rooted in creation. They were not only warmly welcomed to follow and learn from him, but were among those who evangelized for him (John 4), reported his resurrection (John 20), and were present in the Upper Room when He poured out His Holy Spirit.

While there were no women among Jesus' first 12 apostles, there were many among his followers who would be shifted into positions of leadership as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit ushered in a new epoch. As Peter explains the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon male and female followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, he interprets what the gathered crowds are witnessing by pointing to the prophecy of Joel 2:

*"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, you old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18, emphasis added)*

This anointing of the Holy Spirit upon both men and women for prophesy, and for all other ministry, is clearly witnessed throughout the remainder of the New Testament. Women serve as deacons (Phoebe, in Romans 16:1), in shared leadership and teaching (Priscilla, Romans 16:2 & Acts 18), and in prophetic ministry (four daughters of Phillip the evangelist, Acts 21:9).

The gifts and anointing of the Holy Spirit are poured out upon both men and women in a radically counter-cultural way because, as Paul explains to the Galatians, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ." (3:28) Paul is not denying gender, ethnicity, or social status, but rather explaining that divisions which previously existed among human beings have been removed in the Messiah, Jesus, who brings all humanity into equality as sons and daughters of God.

This unity and equality is witnessed most fully as Revelation pictures a new heaven and new earth in which men and women, no longer marrying, equally share in reigning with Christ “forever and ever.” (Rev. 22:5) Here we see a restoration of what God first created, and deemed good—*men and women reigning together, under God*. From Genesis to Revelation, this is the most elemental and lasting thing which Scripture has to say about the relationship between men and women, their shared assignment, and their shared calling to bear God’s image.

## Other Scriptural Considerations

### **Marriage: One Form of Male-Female Relationship**

Male and female, reigning together under God (Gen 1 & Rev. 22) is the primary, most important, and lasting form of male-female relationship. Marriage is a secondary male-female relationship involving covenant commitment, intimacy, and shared purpose.

Instituted by God in creation, and affirmed by the New Testament, marriage is not an enduring reality that will be present in the fullness of the Kingdom of God. As Paul counseled believers about living in light of the fact that “this world in its present form is passing away,” (1 Cor. 7:31), he was already encouraging singleness as a preferable option for those who desire to be “free of concern,” able to fully vest themselves in “the Lord’s affairs.”

The fact that marriage is not enduring is important for understanding that any conclusions about the male-female marriage relationship in this age must be understood in the light of God’s primary intentions for male and female in creation and new creation—*reigning together under Him*.

In Ephesians 5, Paul addresses the way in which several human relationships: wives and husbands, slaves and masters, children and fathers, are each transformed as believers are “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (v. 18-21)

### **Marriage, Submission & Headship**

In Ephesians 5, submission marked by love and humility is primarily being taught as a mark of humanity made new in Christ, and then secondarily applied to various human relationships in ways that would dramatically confront societal norms which so often view life through the lens of power and authority rather than service and responsibility to support.

In the Greek, verse 22 is the same sentence as, and carries on the thought, of verse 21. As Paul applies the principle of mutual submission to marriage, he commands: “Wives, to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband/man is the head of the wife/woman as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, of which He is the Savior.” (v. 22-23) The words translated as submission and head both deserve closer inspection.

## Submission

Regarding “submission” one very helpful article states:

The Greek word, *hupotassō*, is often translated as “submitting to” or “being subject” in Ephesians 5:21-22. However, this Greek word has more than one use and a range of meaning that is quite different from what is commonly understood today. *Hupotassō* actually has two uses: military and non-military. The military has a connotation of being “subject to” or “to obey,” as if you are under someone’s command. Most contemporary people would probably think of this meaning. However, the non-military use means “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.” In ancient papyri the word, *hupotassō*, commonly meant to “support,” “append,” or “uphold.”

Some Bible translations recognize that *hupotassō* has more than one use. For example, The Message Bible translates Ephesians 5:21 as “be courteously reverent.” The New Century Version translates *hupotassō* as “cooperate” rather than “submit” in 1 Timothy 2:11 and 3:4. Andrew and Judith Lester, authors of *It Takes Two: The Joy of Intimate Marriage*, suggest a better translation is “be supportive of,” “tend to the needs of,” or “respect the needs and desires of.”<sup>1</sup>

In the context of Ephesians 5:18-23, wives are to cooperate with, support, uphold, and respect their husbands as one result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Rather than being a universal injunction for wives to be under the authority of their husbands, or even a statement about leadership in marriage, this passage is about the transformative effects of the gospel on how wives and husbands relate to each other. The Holy Spirit calls for and produces a joyful desire to support, uphold, and respect where it once was lacking.

## Headship

What does the Bible mean when it says the husband/man is the head of his wife/woman (Eph. 5:23)? First, we are writing husband/man and wife/woman intentionally, because the words used by Paul in this passage are most often (about 75% of the time) translated as man and woman, though they do, at times, mean husband and wife. As we will see in a moment, it will be helpful to remember this.

There are two different Greek words for head. Instead of choosing to use a Greek word that would commonly convey hierarchical or authoritarian leadership (*isarche*) Paul here chooses a word (*kephale*) that can mean “source.” When Paul says that the husband/man is the source (head) of the wife/woman, he is likely rooting marriage in the creation account, where man is indeed the source for God’s creation of woman. Paul will again reference the creation account in verse 31. Recognizing these ties back to the creation account helps us clearly understand the command for a husband to love and serve His wife, as he would his own body. Because God brought forth woman from man, she should be respected and tended to as carefully as he would love and tend to his very own body.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/fresh-perspective-submission-and-authority-marriage/>

He is her source, just as Christ is the source of his Church. And therefore, a husband's love for his wife ought to mimic Christ's love for His bride, the Church. Here we see a "headship" that is marked by self-sacrificial love!

### **Summary of Marriage Relationship**

Self-sacrificial love as an application of the principle of mutual submission applied to the role of a man within a marriage does not infer any hierarchy or assignment differentiation. Rather it describes the manner in which a husband is to relate to his wife *as Christ does to the Church*. Similarly, the "submission" of wives to their husbands should be understood as a dramatic application of the principle of mutual submission which marks human beings made new in Christ.

Therefore, we affirm male headship in marriage as biblical, as it describes the manner in which a man loves and serves his wife (and children). We believe that Scripture, and this passage in particular, does not limit or disqualify women from serving in Church leadership. Wives are not subservient to their husbands, and husbands are not subservient to their wives.

### **Leadership in the Church**

But what about Paul's exhortations in 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 about the participation of women? Don't Paul's statements in these passages prohibit a woman's leadership in the Church? These are important, and as stated earlier, often misunderstood texts. Before offering a very brief analysis of each passage, it is important to be reminded of the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture—the analogy of Scripture. No theology about the role of women in the leadership of the Church ought to be formed by one or two passages that seem inconsistent with the thrust of the rest of Scripture.

#### **1 Corinthians 14:33b-35: Are Women to Remain Silent?**

Here, as Paul teaches about corporate meetings in which the gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit are welcomed in an orderly and peace-filled manner, he writes: "As in all the congregations of the saints, women/wives should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman/wife to speak in the church." (14:34-35)

At first glance, the command for women/wives to be silent and submissive seems as though it could be prohibiting the participation of women in church leadership. However, earlier in the very same discourse about corporate worship, Paul instructs women to both "pray and prophecy" with her head covered (11:5-6). Here we have separate instructions, within the same section of teaching about honoring and orderly worship that seem to contradict each other. How are women to both "pray and prophecy" while also remaining "silent in the churches"?

To resolve this dilemma, we need only observe that faithful Christian women the world around no longer wear head coverings (scarves, shawls, hats, etc.) to worship. The reason for this is that we understand Paul to have been offering a culturally appropriate gender specific application (when praying or prophesying, women should have head coverings and men shouldn't) to support the enduring principle that each believer ought to worship in ways that demonstrate proper submission to and honor of God's authority.

Similarly, in 14:33b-35, Paul seems to be offering a situationally specific application (wives should not speak to their husbands, particularly in ways that would usurp them, during corporate worship) to an enduring principle (worship, as led by the Holy Spirit, should be orderly, peaceful, and edifying for all). It is helpful to note that this is the third of three injunctions to silence in corporate worship that Paul gives. Each of them is aimed at the same goals of orderly, peaceful, edifying worship. He has earlier told those speaking in tongues to "keep quiet" if there is no interpreter (v.28) and those offering a prophetic word to "stop speaking" if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down.

As the rest of chapters 12-14 make clear, the Corinthian believers are freely moving in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and yet need encouragement for doing so from the right motivation—love—and in the right manner—orderly, and peace-filled. Paul's prohibitions in verses 33b-35 seem to indicate that wives were questioning their husbands about things they did not yet understand during corporate worship, a practice that was distracting to others. Paul's counsel was not a universal prohibition upon all women speaking in corporate worship gatherings, but rather a specific directive aimed at the husband-wife relationship, stating that wives ought not speak out in ways that contribute to chaotic worship or that dishonor their husbands, honoring the principles of headship and mutual submission discussed earlier.

### **1 Timothy 2:11-15: Are Women to Be Quiet and Unilaterally Submissive?**

Distinguishing between enduring principles and situationally specific applications of those principles is also necessary for understanding this passage, where Paul, again, instructs that "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission." (v. 11) Here, it is important to note that in the preceding verses, Paul has offered two applications which the church does not teach as universally binding. Paul says that he wants "men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer," (v. 8) and women to restrain from "braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes." (v. 9-10) While Paul's emphasis is upon "*holy* hands," the church does not teach that men must raise their hands in order to pray faithfully. Nor does the church teach that women may not wear gold or pearls or braid their hair. This is precisely because we understand Paul to be offering situationally specific applications to the enduring principles of worshiping in unity, with humility and a clean heart, at peace with others, and of living, dressing, and worshiping modestly in a way that draws attention to God, and not to ourselves.

Similarly, as Paul explains his command that women learn in quietness and full submission by stating, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to 'dominate/usurp authority over' a man; but to remain quiet," (v.12) we see him applying the enduring principle of

orderly worship where there is mutual submission to one another out of reverence for Christ to a specific situation in Ephesus. Paul was calling for orderly worship from women who had been used to both prominence and dominance in their previous service to the goddess, Artemis (aka Diana), whose temple in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

The cult of Diana was exceedingly maternalistic, with male attendants in her temple being castrated and kept subjugated. Artemis (or Diana), the daughter of Zeus, was attended to by a dedicated band of unmarried female attendants, and as one reputed to be a “perpetual virgin,” she fiercely resisted any male attempts to subjugate her by child bearing.

This very brief introduction to the strong cultic background of new Ephesian believers helps to understand what Paul is countering as he writes his letter to Timothy. In essence, and the grammar supports this, Paul is saying, “I don’t permit a woman/wife (same word) to teach in such a way as to dominate a man/husband (same word).” The word often translated as “have authority” is only used here in the NT, and is not the word Paul chooses for “authority” on other occasions. In this case the word chosen is a very strong and negative term describing brutal, domineering actions, and not one that would ordinarily be associated with any kind of Church leadership, male or female. If Paul wanted to discuss women in church leadership, he would have used a different word. Paul didn’t use a different word precisely because he is not talking about church leadership.

Paul is resisting not only the kind of domineering leadership of radical Ephesian feminists who are coming out of or influenced by cultic teaching, but also their misconceptions about the inherent goodness of childbearing. Paul is countering radically pagan ideas by pointing to creation and the creation order to remind wives that child bearing is indeed holy. Moreover, as he reminds them that Eve, not Adam, first introduced sin by welcoming deception, he is calling for their humility as he reminds them of their equality, before God, with their husbands.

Paul is **not** making a universal prohibition of speech in corporate worship for all women but rather giving a pastoral rebuke of inappropriate attitudes and behavior on the part of some women towards men, which is not exclusive to husbands and wives. This is made clear by Paul’s use of the same word for submission that he uses in Ephesians 5, when he calls women to submit to their husbands as the Church does to Christ. Once again the enduring principles of mutual submission and honoring, orderly, peaceful worship are applied to the male-female and husband-wife relationship in the context of corporate worship of a young church. There is **nothing** in this text that suggests Paul is offering a universal prohibition upon female participation in the leadership of the Church, whether through teaching, or any of the offices.



## Summary

God’s intention in creation, restored through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit, is for men and women to reign together, under him. We together share the image of God, and we together share an assignment from God. That assignment will only be fully and faithfully completed as men and women are both welcomed to serve in the leadership of the Church in such a way as to give witness to the world that, in Christ, all divisions and effects of the curse are removed. When women are not welcomed into leadership in the Church, the Church vastly misses out upon the gifts given them by the Holy Spirit, intended to bless, strengthen, and grow the Church. As we have explained, we believe a careful review of Scripture fully supports this claim. Moreover, our own experience, and that of Church history, both strongly corroborate the goodness of men and women serving together in leadership within the body of Christ. Indeed, there are countless stories, from the worldwide church, and from our own ministry, which display this goodness, and ought to be told. But given we promised a concise position statement, those stories await a future telling. For now, we conclude by saying we are deeply grateful to have both men and women serve as pastors and office bearers, and we praise God for the gift of sharing leadership in Christ’s Church with one another.

### Additional Resources For Further Reading

[Fuller Theological Statement on Women in Ministry](#) (A helpful reference for those who want to dig a little more deeply into the biblical exegesis.)

[Headship in Ephesians](#)

[A Biblical Case for Women in Ministry: Panel Discussion](#) Calvin Theological Seminary, 2017

[How Should We Interpret 1 Corinthians 11:2-16?](#) (A very helpful article for beginning to understand the issues of headship, authority, and head coverings in this notoriously difficult to interpret passage.)

[A Fresh Perspective on Submission and Authority in Marriage](#)

[A Cause for Division? Women in Office and the Unity of the Church.](#) John W. Cooper. Calvin Theological Seminary. 1991. (A photocopied copy is available for borrowing from the church).

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- REVISION HISTORY -

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