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## **The Role of Women in Ministry**

### *Introduction*

Issues surrounding the role of women in church ministry and leadership are among the most highly debated and highly charged in contemporary Christian culture. The discussion has arguably existed since the very inception of the church, giving rise to special instructions in the biblical epistles. In twenty-first-century America, with the rise of the feminist movement and advances in gender equality, the debate over women's roles in church ministry has become more complex and nuanced. In recent years, the Christian & Missionary Alliance has reignited this discussion amongst the denomination by initiating a "national conversation" regarding the role of women in ministry.

In a video statement issued on April 9, 2021, after about two years of this national conversation, John Stumbo, the President of the Christian & Missionary Alliance asks, "If our policies unnecessarily limit people from Kingdom service, are we not obligated to address that weakness?"<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Terry Smith, Vice President for Church Ministries, states at the start of the conversation, "Alliance leaders at every level continue to discuss the role of women in ministry and leadership in the church, seeking to formulate and implement policies and procedures that encourage women in their call to ministry and that are based in Scripture."<sup>2</sup> The C&MA has a long and at times contentious history of debating the role of women in ministry and creating clear and concise policies to match our views. This time around, Stumbo and Smith are working hard to maintain a tone of civility and mutual respect as thousands of pastors do their

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<sup>1</sup> John Stumbo, "Polity Update – John Stumbo Video Blog No. 93," April 9, 2021, <https://legacy.cmalliance.org/video/watch/47532/>.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Smith, "Alliance Perspectives: Women in Ministry," May 2018, <https://legacy.cmalliance.org/video/watch/47532/>.

best to study relevant Scriptures and create policies that are scripturally sound, but also allow Jesus’s disciples (both men and women) the most latitude possible to fulfill their call to ministry. In Stumbo’s video, he playfully states, “Some have thought that if we just open our Bibles together, we’ll all come up with the same conclusion. I don’t believe that to be accurate, because I’ve witnessed how deeply some of us have wrestled with the Scriptures, coming to different conclusions, and holding to those conclusions dearly.”<sup>3</sup> He encourages those involved in the conversation to hold to their convictions, but adds, “as you do, we have one request. Please accept the fact that other Jesus-loving, Bible-honoring leaders and congregations have come to different conclusions. And they have a place at the Alliance table as well.”<sup>4</sup>

As it stands, women are unable to be ordained by the C&MA. Men and women can go through an almost identical two-year process, but in the end, men are ordained (taking the title “reverend”) and women consecrated (taking the title “CWM—consecrated woman of ministry”). Some of the more nuanced considerations in this debate include permitting the title “pastor” to be used by women, as well as unifying the outcomes for men and women of the ordination/consecration process. One of the issues raised by women currently working in the C&MA is that women can fulfill the exact same role and function in church ministry as their male counterparts, but not be allowed to use the title “pastor”. This can cause confusion over what that woman’s role and responsibilities are and has prevented some women from serving as chaplains, while also resulting in restricted hospital visitation by women.<sup>5</sup> The C&MA has expressed that “while desiring both genders to be mobilized to exercise their gifts in a variety of ministries and leadership roles, The Alliance continues to affirm its understanding of Scripture

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<sup>3</sup> Stumbo, “Video No. 93.”

<sup>4</sup> Stumbo, “Video No. 93.”

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Silliman, “Christian and Missionary Alliance Considers Calling Women ‘Pastors’,” *Christianity Today*, May 5, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/may/cma-women-pastor-consecration-ordination-change.html>.

that elders are male members of the local church. This includes the elected elders of the local church and the senior/lead pastor.”<sup>6</sup> One question raised, however, is whether or not the title “pastor” should be equated with the position of eldership. What is at stake in this debate, on the one hand, is whether we are unnecessarily restricting women from fulfilling their God-given calling. On the other side of the debate, what is at stake is allowing women to fulfill roles scripturally restricted to males, perhaps calling into question our obedience to Scripture or even the authority of Scripture itself. The topic needs to be approached with both careful analysis of the relevant Scriptures, and Spirit-empowered humility to determine biblical convictions and discuss them in a way that upholds the biblical unity of believers, even if they are in disagreement.

Two polarized views take prominence in the debate over women in ministry. First, is the complementarian view<sup>7</sup> which takes passages such as 1 Timothy 2:9-15 at face value, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission ... [not] to teach or have authority over a man.” On the other hand, the egalitarian view holds that there are cultural or circumstantial issues involved at the heart of Paul’s instructions and that women should have the liberty to hold prominent roles in the church.<sup>8</sup> The complementarian view can sound quite chauvinistic to our twenty-first-century ears; perhaps less so if we are ourselves immersed in the complementarian view. As we examine this subject, however, we must take heed of the caution offered by Walter L. Liefeld, not to force “the biblical data into our contemporary ecclesiologies.”<sup>9</sup> We must be

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<sup>6</sup> Terry Smith, “Alliance Perspectives.”

<sup>7</sup> Formerly known as the “traditionalist” view.

<sup>8</sup> In between these two ends of the spectrum lies any number of positions, either centered or leaning more one way or the other. As an example, Susan T. Foh writes to represent the “Male Leadership” position, which affirms a woman’s biblical right to minister provided she is under the oversight of a male, in:

Susan T. Foh, “The Head of the Woman is the Man,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 69-105.

<sup>9</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, “Your Sons and Your Daughter Shall Prophecy,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 151.

careful not to uphold the complementarian view simply because we are ourselves from such a tradition. Likewise, we must not assume full equality based upon the relative equality of our contemporary culture.

As we begin to look at the issue of women in ministry, a handful of key passages emerge: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 1 Corinthians 14:33-40; and 1 Timothy 2:9-15.<sup>10</sup> It also becomes evident that the issue of women in ministry cannot be studied in isolation from some other issues, such as the authority of men over women (particularly in marriage) and the related use of the Greek term “*Kephalē*” to designate a man as “head” of a woman (again, with some discussion of marriage).<sup>11</sup>

### *The Starting Point*

Craig S. Keener begins a discussion of women in ministry under the heading “The Problem”. Under this heading, he begins his argument, “Some passages in the Bible support a wide variety of women’s ministry....”<sup>12</sup> Others, he goes on to point out, appear to restrict women’s ministry, such as 1 Timothy 2. Then he states, “Sadly, some Christians who start with one group of texts view with suspicion Christians who start with other group of texts.”<sup>13</sup> Do we begin a proper study on women’s roles in ministry with the prominent passages that seem to restrict women’s roles? Or by observing that there are named in the New Testament women who held positions of notable church ministry? Further, to highlight the complexity of the overall topic, do we understand these women, such as Deborah, Priscilla, and Phoebe to name a few, as exceptions to the rule, or as a demonstration of the rule, to which the restrictions are the exception?

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<sup>10</sup> We will also examine the impact of Galatians 3:28 and related passages on the above.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 145-202.

<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 205.

<sup>13</sup> Keener, “Women,” 206.

It is important to note the many examples of women who were acknowledged for their participation in different types of ministry in the New Testament. In Romans 16:1-2, Paul writes, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae” (NIV). There is some debate whether or not Phoebe served in the office of “deacon”, but it is reasonable to believe she did, as also 1 Timothy 3:11 seems to speak of women serving as deacons.<sup>14</sup> Four women, Mary and Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis are named as “laborers” (Rom. 16:6 and 16:12), as well as three others who are called “coworkers,” Prisca (Romans 16:3) and Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:3).<sup>15</sup> There is even some discussion as to whether Junia is referred to by Paul as an apostle (although this likely referred to them in the sense of itinerant missionaries).<sup>16</sup> If these women’s roles were exceptions, that would allow for women to assume prominent roles in church ministry, but also exceptions to rules highlight that the rules exist to begin with. However, there does not seem to be any indication in these passages that these women are exceptions rather than normative in the early church.

### *Is Galatians 3:28 an Appropriate Starting Point?*

In Galatians 3:28, Paul declares, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” In his response to an essay entitled “Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution,” W. Ward Gasque states that Galatians 3:28 “is the necessary theological starting place for any discussion on the role of women in the church.”<sup>17</sup> He further cites F.F. Bruce as pointing out, “Paul states the basic principle here; if

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner offers several reasons why he believes this passage is referring to women serving as deacons. First, Paul uses the same linking word, “likewise,” as he did to introduce male deacons. Second, Paul could have easily clarified by adding *of deacons* or specifically *their* wives. Third, the qualifications for women are very similar to those of men serving as deacons. And fourth, why would Paul discuss the wives of deacons, but not the wives of elders, arguably a more important role.

Thomas R. Schreiner, “Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology” (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), p. 3-4. Exported from Logos Bible Software, 12:33 PM September 22, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 5.

<sup>16</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 8.

<sup>17</sup> W. Ward Gasque, “Response to Galatians 3:28: Conundrum or Solution,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 189.

restrictions on it are found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus, as in 1 Cor. 14:34f...1 Timothy 2:11f., they are to be understood in relation to Gal. 3:28, and not vice versa.”<sup>18</sup> Gasque then adds that “by taking Galatians 3:28 as the starting place for Paul’s view on women, it becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, to come to the traditionalist [complementarian] conclusion.”<sup>19</sup> With this understanding as a starting point, those women listed above, who were named in positions of authority/ministry, are not the exceptions, but rather the exceptions become the Pauline restrictions. On a related note, Keener spends some time discussing the acceptance of women exhibited by Jesus, proving “in many respects...unusual in his day.”<sup>20</sup> Christ’s treatment of the woman at the well is one example. But Keener takes this a step further, proposing that Jesus may have even accepted women as disciples (Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:38-42) “something few if any other rabbis did.”<sup>21</sup> Many scholars have taken the list of women Paul names (such as in the greetings of Romans 16), as giving credibility to using Galatians 3:28 and other parallel passages<sup>22</sup> as our starting point in understanding the restriction texts. But Schreiner asserts that such a reading is not authentic Pauline theology and warns against reading Paul as if he were a modern-day feminist.<sup>23</sup> Instead, he insists we understand Galatians 3:28 as “a soteriological statement, heralding equal access to salvation through Christ Jesus. It does not follow from this that there are no social consequences from the declaration.”<sup>24</sup> Paul clearly continues to believe there are differences between males and females. Galatians 3:28 does not contradict this.

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<sup>18</sup> Gasque, “Response,” 189-190.

<sup>19</sup> Gasque, “Response,” 190.

<sup>20</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 245.

<sup>21</sup> Keener, “Women,” 245. In Luke 10, Keener points out that sitting at a Rabbi’s feet is a position of discipleship which Jesus defends “against Martha’s preference for traditional matronly roles.”

<sup>22</sup> See also Rom. 10:12-13; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:9-11.

<sup>23</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 9.

<sup>24</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 10.

### 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The traditional view of this passage begins with the issue of headship. Robert D. Culver explains that this headship is “a common metaphor for authority...The Christian man’s head is Christ, and the Christian woman’s (not wife’s) head is man, as also Christ is head of God.”<sup>25</sup> Culver, therefore, concludes that this headship is the reason behind the head coverings for women (and lack thereof for men) as a matter of honor and disgrace. Paul uses the creation order “to support his teaching of male precedence in public worship in the church.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, Paul states in verses 8-10, “man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, ... the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.” Culver’s complementarian viewpoint begins with the patriarchal understanding that a woman is hierarchically subordinate to a man. The evidence or display of submission to men’s authority is her head covering.

David K. Lowery makes similar, though less poignant observations in his comments on 1 Corinthians in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*. He asserts that the Greek word for “head”, *kephalē*, about which there is great debate,<sup>27</sup> means “subordination” and “origination”; the “former reflects the more usual Old Testament usage ... the latter that of Greek vernacular.”<sup>28</sup> This seems a softer take on the headship issue than Culver. Additionally, Lowery includes a distinction between man and woman, and husband and wife. He states that “a woman’s (a

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<sup>25</sup> Robert D. Culver, “Let Your Women Keep Silence,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>26</sup> Culver, “Silence,” 31.

<sup>27</sup> For just a few examples of this debate, see: Wayne Grudem, “The Meaning of *Kephalē* (‘Head’): An Evaluation of New Evidence, Real and Alleged,” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 145-202. In it he argues quite extensively for the meaning “authority over” and against the meaning “source”. Also, see Berkeley Mickelsen and Alvera Mickelsen, “What Does *Kephalē* Mean in the New Testament?” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 97-110. The Mickelsens argue for a metaphorical definition, claiming that if Paul had intended to say “authority” or “leader” he would have used the more regular terms “*exousia*” or “*archōn*”.

<sup>28</sup> David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1983), 529.

wife's) glory and image was derived from and complementary to (vs. 9) that of the man (her husband)."<sup>29</sup> The Greek word used is “*gunē*”, which can be translated as woman or wife (as “*anēr*” can be translated man or husband). The NIV, for example, translates this passage as “the head of the woman is man,”<sup>30</sup> while the ESV states, “the head of a wife is her husband.”<sup>31</sup> Whereas Culver makes a point of identifying “the Christian woman’s (*not wife’s*) head is man...,”<sup>32</sup> Lowery makes the contrary point that based upon verse 9, Paul frames this issue in marriage. Lowery ignores the implications of this on single women and widows.

Most writers, even the more conservative, grant that head coverings had a cultural element and are not necessary in today’s culture. Walter L. Liefeld discusses the range of views from “the traditionalist retention of the commands in their precise form,” to the view that Paul was arguing based upon his Jewish upbringing to which we are not bound.<sup>33</sup> He suggests that the commands taken at face value may not always be appropriate, but rather we must wrestle with cultural and even circumstantial factors to separate the “abiding principle.”<sup>34</sup> Lowery touches on these cultural elements in his look at verses 11-12, “Man is not superior in being to woman.”<sup>35</sup> The head covering Paul speaks of is an expression of a woman’s subordination. Likewise, Paul’s discussion of hair length follows that same logic. Lowery says, “No abstract length of hair was in mind so much as male and female differentiation.”<sup>36</sup> He concludes that Paul was trying “simply to hold the line against self-indulgent individual excess in the name of freedom.”<sup>37</sup> And

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<sup>29</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 529.

<sup>30</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> *Student Study Bible: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Robert D. Culver, “Let Your Women Keep Silence,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 30. Emphasis mine.

<sup>33</sup> Walter L Liefeld, “Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 135.

<sup>34</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 135.

<sup>35</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 529.

<sup>36</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 530.

<sup>37</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 530.

finally, for today “the principle of subordination (not the command to wear [head coverings]) is the key point in this passage.”<sup>38</sup>

Keener presses into the inconsistency of dismissing women’s head coverings for cultural reasons while upholding the restriction on women teaching. He points out, “in one passage, Paul does not want the women of a certain congregation to teach; in the other passage, he wants the women of a certain congregation to cover their heads. We take the argument as transculturally applicable in one case, but not so in the other. This seems very strange indeed.”<sup>39</sup>

Keener takes these cultural implications one step further giving a very detailed and descript understanding of head coverings at the time of Paul’s writing. He explains that “women’s hair was a common object of lust in antiquity, and in much of the eastern Mediterranean women were expected to cover their hair.”<sup>40</sup> This was common practice in much of Jewish Palestine, but upper-class women were more eager to show off their fashionable hairstyles. Thus, Paul is addressing a clash of cultures within the church between “upper-class fashion and lower-class concern that sexual propriety is being violated.”<sup>41</sup> Regarding headship, Keener writes, “Ancient writers often based arguments on wordplays, as Paul does here. He uses “head” literally (for that which is to be covered) and figuratively (for the authority figure in the ancient household).”<sup>42</sup> While women played much lesser roles in synagogues and Jewish tradition, “Paul’s churches allow considerably more freedom for women’s ministry.”<sup>43</sup> Regarding Paul’s comments on hair length, Keener points out that he is using an ancient debate principle he calls “*reductio ad absurdum*” – reducing their insistence to the absurd.<sup>44</sup> Thus, if

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<sup>38</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 530.

<sup>39</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 19.

<sup>40</sup> Craig S. Keener, “1 Corinthians,” in the *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1993), 475.

<sup>41</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 475.

<sup>42</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 476.

<sup>43</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 476.

<sup>44</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 476.

women were so eager to show off their heads (ie – go without head coverings), why not go ahead and shave them (the “greatest physical shame” for women of their time).<sup>45</sup> Keener further argues that Paul’s look to creation emphasizes women’s strength, not subordination. That Eve was created to be Adam’s “helper” does not imply weakness, rather “woman was thus created because man needed her strength, not (as some have wrongly interpreted) to be his servant.”<sup>46</sup>

John Temple Bristow mirrors this thought in his book *What Paul Really Said About Women*.

Bristow goes as far as to say that Paul

topples the traditional interpretation...that [women] are inferior to men because Eve was created out of Adam. Paul observed that every man alive came out of woman (that is was born of a woman). The implication is that if Eve were inferior to Adam by virtue of being made out of his body, then every man is inferior to his mother for the same reason.<sup>47</sup>

Liefeld does not go into such detail regarding specific cultural mores of the day. But he does seek out that “abiding principle” within the cultural language. He points to Paul’s repeating theme of glory and disgrace, which he believes is Paul’s underlying concern, that “Christians maintain an orderly worship that brings glory to God (which is tied to bringing glory to each other).”<sup>48</sup> Liefeld introduces a secular writing by Plutarch regarding Theano, the wife of Pythagoras, to show that “the idea of exposure of a woman’s inner person underlies the restriction of public speech as well as the physical covering.”<sup>49</sup> Culturally, there existed a “moralistic view that women should not express themselves visually or vocally in public because that would be a disgrace.”<sup>50</sup> If we understand restrictions such as Paul asserts in 1 Corinthians 11 as the exceptions, rather than the rule, we must seek to understand the particular reason for the

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<sup>45</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 476.

<sup>46</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 476.

<sup>47</sup> John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 60.

<sup>48</sup> Walter L Liefeld, “Women, Submission and Ministry in 1 Corinthians,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 140.

<sup>49</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 141.

<sup>50</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 142.

restrictions. That reason, asserts Liefeld, was to “avoid social criticism that might hinder the gospel.”<sup>51</sup> Liefeld points out, too, that Paul’s discussion of women covering their heads while they pray or prophesy highlights the fact that they are allowed to pray and prophesy! He adds that “Paul is thus affirming that women do have a God-given right to pray and prophesy, but that they can exercise that right only if they do so without causing social offense by bringing shame on their husbands through uncovered heads” based upon cultural norms of the day.<sup>52</sup>

*1 Corinthians 14:33-40*

Lowery begins his commentary on this section of Scripture with the admission that “the exact meaning of these verses is difficult to determine.”<sup>53</sup> He links this passage to Paul’s previous discussion on tongue and prophecy, concluding that Paul is focused on the need for the church to exercise self-control “expressed by silence in order that the assembly might be characterized by peace.”<sup>54</sup> Here, as in chapter 11, there is debate over the meaning of “*gunē*” as either women or wives. Lowery sides with the meaning of married women, because of the call for submission, which he points out, is always connected to married women elsewhere in the New Testament, as well as his instruction to “ask their own husbands.”<sup>55</sup> Lowery sees this passage as a call for married women to remain silent as an expression of their subordinate (but not inferior) relationship to their husbands, in contrast to the disturbance otherwise caused by wives talking to their husbands during the service.<sup>56</sup>

This passage issues an injunction to women to remain silent and to be in submission, interestingly Paul elucidates, “as the Law says.” It may be reflex for us to understand this as

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<sup>51</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 142.

<sup>52</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 146.

<sup>53</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 541.

<sup>54</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 541.

<sup>55</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 541.

<sup>56</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 541.

Jewish Law, but Liefeld rightly asks, “what law is Paul referring to...?”<sup>57</sup> Keener, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, observes that:

Biblical law includes no specific text that enjoins silence or submission on women, although Paul could refer back to his creation argument in 11:8-9 or to the effects of the curse in Genesis 3:16. But he can also use “law” generally (1 Cor. 14:21); thus here he could be referring only to the generally subordinate position of women in Old Testament times.<sup>58</sup>

Liefeld also offers a few suggestions such as general Jewish and Gentile laws that restricted the public participation of women, or that he is referring to a general understanding of the Old Testament. In exploring this, Liefeld offers a quote from the “historian Livy from a speech by the elder Cato shortly before 200 B.C.,” in which Cato says, “Could you not have made the same requests, each of your own husbands, at home?”<sup>59</sup> This is a similar question to Paul’s, but it is unclear if this is what Paul had in mind. Liefeld also offers some social background issues that may have influenced Paul, such as the experience of pagan converts to Christianity prior to conversion. They would have been used to “orgiastic madness” and “pagan excesses.”<sup>60</sup> This would work well with the theological context, that which Paul is addressing, orderly worship.

Bristow agrees with this saying, “The context of this passage is public worship. More specifically, it is orderliness in public worship. Paul’s central theme was “For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33a).”<sup>61</sup> Bristow further expands on the idea of “silence” – that the Greek word used (*sigao*) is not a harsh, forced silence, but a voluntary silence, as the decision of the disciples to remain silent about the transfiguration.<sup>62</sup> Further, when Paul says, “it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church,” Bristow insists, “he did not write that women are not to preach, or teach, or declare, or give a discourse, or proclaim, or

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<sup>57</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 149.

<sup>58</sup> Keener, “1 Corinthians,” 483.

<sup>59</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 150.

<sup>60</sup> Liefeld, “Submission,” 151.

<sup>61</sup> John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Bristow, “Paul,” 62.

affirm, or avert, or speak for something, or any other of the distinctive meanings found in man... verbs.”<sup>63</sup> The verb Paul used here was, again, a softer verb which simply meant “it is shameful for women<sup>64</sup> to keep talking during the worship service.”<sup>65</sup> Bristow presents the newness of mixed gender gatherings and adds a comical Pauline paraphrase:

Paul approved of women praying and prophesying during worship. He insisted that men and women should be together and that in Christ they are one. But these were new and radical ideas to both Jew and Gentile. In practice, sexual equality among Christians led to a disregard for orderliness and courtesy during worship, especially on the part of women who were unaccustomed to listening to public speakers or to participate in public worship. To such women, Paul said, “Hush up.”<sup>66</sup>

Paul’s intended outcome, then, is not utter and ultimate silence on the part of women, but in line with the biblical context surrounding this passage, Paul seeks orderly and respectful worship that edifies everyone present.

Keener adds more to this line of thinking, as well. He sees the problem that Paul is addressing, not as “*teaching*, but rather that the women are *learning* – too loudly.”<sup>67</sup> He not only connects women’s silence grammatically to the statement that it is shameful for women to speak in church but also softens our understanding of “shameful” to be “a term that can mean culturally inappropriate.”<sup>68</sup> Keener understands Paul as “addressing their asking questions in church in an effort to learn,” as being inappropriate and possibly disruptive.<sup>69</sup> He further adds that “Throughout the first-century Mediterranean world, novices were expected to learn quietly, but more advanced students were expected to interrupt all kinds of public lectures with questions.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Bristow, “Paul,” 63.

<sup>64</sup> Bristow also addresses the question of why Paul addressed only women about this and did not include men in the instruction. He points out that the social roles, particularly of married women, kept them mostly in the home and unaccustomed to the expectations of a public worship service.

<sup>65</sup> Bristow, “Paul,” 63.

<sup>66</sup> Bristow, “Paul,” 64.

<sup>67</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 228.

<sup>68</sup> Keener, “Women,” 50.

<sup>69</sup> Keener, “Women,” 50.

<sup>70</sup> Keener, “Women,” 50.

Addressing the question of why it was thought shameful for women to be asking questions, Keener offers that it may have been because of the “culturally expected submissive role of their gender,” which, he asserts, would not require a restriction on women asking questions today.<sup>71</sup> But he offers what might be a better answer relevant to the inappropriateness of novice questions during lectures. Questions during public lectures were expected, but “unlearned questions were considered foolish and rude.”<sup>72</sup> Women generally lacked any significant education and were thus “unlearned.” Their questions, although driven by an eagerness to learn, would violate this protocol and Paul’s short-term solution was that they should “therefore...learn quietly.”<sup>73</sup> His long-term solution was for the husbands to teach them (answer their questions) at home. This would have been a very progressive suggestion since most men felt their wives were incapable of significant learning.<sup>74</sup>

#### *1 Timothy 2:9-15*

Linda Belleville poetically captures the significance of 1 Timothy 2 in the debate over women’s roles in ministry:

The battle over women leaders in the church continues to rage unabated in evangelical circles. At the center of the tempest sits 1 Timothy 2:11-15. Despite a broad spectrum of biblical and extrabiblical texts that highlight female leaders, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 continues to be perceived and treated as the Great Divide in the debate. Indeed, a hierarchical interpretation of this passage has become for some a litmus test for the label *evangelical* and even a necessity for the salvation of unbelievers.<sup>75</sup>

This passage seems to be, as indicated by Belleville, the strongest argument for the complementarian view. The issue raised by 1 Timothy 2:9-15 appears to be that of the nature of authority within the church hierarchy. Here, Paul writes that women are to “learn in quietness

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<sup>71</sup> Keener, “Women,” 51.

<sup>72</sup> Keener, “Women,” 51.

<sup>73</sup> Keener, “Women,” 51.

<sup>74</sup> Keener, “Women,” 51.

<sup>75</sup> Linda L. Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 205.

and full submission...[not] to teach or have authority over a man.” To further bulwark this position, Paul seems to indicate that this instruction is based upon the very creation of humanity – Adam and Eve. A. Duane Litfin voices the complementarian view of this passage stating, “More is involved here than mere chronological priority. Paul saw the priority in time as indicative of the leadership given to the male, to which the woman, the “helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18) should respond.”<sup>76</sup> To take this even deeper, Paul further qualifies his instructions (v. 14) with the explanation that “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” But despite his more conservative position, Litfin clarifies that “some chauvinists see Paul arguing here that women, as represented in their archetypal Eve, are more gullible and thus more susceptible to error, than men. Thus, they say, females should not be in places of teaching or authority in the church.”<sup>77</sup>

Some have indicated that the restrictions placed on a woman are part of the retribution of Eve, or that women are more easily deceived than men. Robert D. Culver writes that Paul is introducing an important new argument here based upon the Genesis account of chapters 1-3. Culver indicates that Paul is not speaking only of Eve, but rather of Eve as the archetypal woman. He argues that Paul is supporting the refusal of women to be authorities in the church or to teach men “by referring to something about woman’s nature – something different about woman as woman from man as man. In the temptation incident woman showed herself to be more susceptible to temptation through deceit than was the man.”<sup>78</sup> He expands on this showing that Eve was clearly deceived by half-truths, but Adam was “persuaded by a tie of affection.”<sup>79</sup> Both sinned; Adam sinned fully aware of the magnitude of his actions. Eve, he continues, was

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<sup>76</sup> A. Duane Litfin, “1 Timothy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1983), 736.

<sup>77</sup> Litfin, “1 Timothy,” 736.

<sup>78</sup> Robert D. Culver, “Let Your Women Keep Silence,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 36.

<sup>79</sup> Culver, “Silence,” 36.

deceived thoroughly. This may be the literal understanding of the Genesis 3 account. However, it seems odd that this would be Paul's basis for the submission of women to men and the restriction of the ministry of women. The case is stated and restated so much as to imply that Adam "won" his position of authority by willingly violating God's command (which he was given charge of ... not Eve—Genesis 2), rather than being deceived. One must call into question which is more admirable, however. There does not seem to be any bragging rights for either party. If pressed to pick the "worse" of the two, it would seem a pretty good case could be made against Adam, who received the initial instruction from God. Litfin distances himself from this generalization about women but does not offer much insight into the reason Paul refers to Eve's deception. He does, however, point out that Paul is in no way absolving Adam, and that elsewhere Paul places the blame squarely on him (Romans 5:12-21, for example).<sup>80</sup>

Bristow offers an excellent understanding of events surrounding this passage in 1 Timothy 2. For starters, he points out that this letter is among the most personal written by Paul, and it is to Timothy to ask him to remain with the church in Ephesus. There were problems with the church, including false teachings, that were greatly troubling Paul.<sup>81</sup> When Paul includes "a woman should learn" (1 Timothy 2:11), it may seem to be written in an oppressive tone, but this was actually a revolutionary thing Paul was doing, as it was "at variance with Jewish and Greek customs."<sup>82</sup> Women were neither educated, nor allowed to teach even the youngest children in school.<sup>83</sup> For Paul to advocate the inclusion of women in education would have been radical and difficult to institute. Women were generally restricted to their own homes and their own families. They would have been unaccustomed to the expectations of education, listening to

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<sup>80</sup> Litfin, "1 Timothy," 736.

<sup>81</sup> It is very interesting to note that each of the three main passages seemingly restricting the role of women in the church appear in letters to troubled churches. This seems to add at least some validity to the idea that these restrictions might be temporary.

<sup>82</sup> John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 70.

<sup>83</sup> Bristow, "Paul," 70.

lectures, studying, or theological concepts.<sup>84</sup> This, argues Bristow, is why women were restricted to learning in silence and submission. This, as with anything new, would have incited criticism and so Paul instructed them to dress “with decency and propriety ... with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.” This is similar to our understanding of the 1 Corinthians passages—that God’s people need to worship in an orderly fashion and should dress and conduct themselves in unity and beyond reproach for the sake of the gospel.

Regarding the reasoning behind the restrictions, Keener asks if this rule, namely, that women are forbidden to teach men, is a universal rule. He has two qualifying tests to help answer that question. First, are there exceptions to the general prohibition? His answer is yes, there are exceptions, “in contrast to genuinely universal biblical rules like those prohibiting homosexual behavior.”<sup>85</sup> Second, does Paul’s letter reveal a situation that would elicit such instructions as these? His answer again is yes, this letter is addressed to “the one church where we know that false teachers were effectively targeting women.”<sup>86</sup>

David M. Scholer gives an excellent handling of this 1 Timothy passage which fits nicely with Bristow’s work. Verse 15 of 1 Timothy 2 gives a rather cryptic statement that many works stumble over or skirt around. Scholer begins with verse 15 and uses it to support his approach to the rest of the passage. AS was noted above by Bristow, the church at Ephesus was being adversely affected by false teachers. Scholer names verse 15 as the climax of the 2:9-15 unit, and also the positive conclusion to the negative statements of verses 11-14.<sup>87</sup> Why does Paul express concern for women’s propriety in verses 9-15? The answer: he is addressing a specific challenge to their behavior. We know from 1 Timothy 4:3 that the false teaching Paul opposes

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<sup>84</sup> Bristow, “Paul,” 70.

<sup>85</sup> Craig S. Keener, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 232.

<sup>86</sup> Keener, “Women,” 232.

<sup>87</sup> David M. Scholer, “1 Timothy 2:9-15 & The Place of Women in the Church’s Ministry,” in *Women, Authority & the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 197.

includes forbidding marriage.<sup>88</sup> This is also evident through Paul's lengthy dealings with marriage issues in chapter 5. Additionally, "concern for proper domestic life is also noted in texts directed to male leaders within the church."<sup>89</sup> Paul's "concern for public reputation, model domestic life, and appropriate decorum and maternal-domestic roles for women clearly. Implies that the opposition (heresy) that Paul and Timothy faced in Ephesus constituted an assault on marriage and what was considered appropriate models for women in that society."<sup>90</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-9 confirms this assault on women's propriety, as we read in verse 6, "They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women." Thus, this seemingly cryptic message in 1 Timothy 2:15 "addresses a particular situation of false teaching in Ephesus that assaulted and abused what was considered appropriate and honorable behavior for women."<sup>91</sup> The rest of the passage, then, more easily aligns itself with the principles put forth in the 1 Corinthians passages. Though the values listed here are specifically geared toward opposing heretical teachings, they are similar in that they affirm "high standards of cultural decency so that the church will be above reproach."<sup>92</sup> Scholer states here that Paul's concern for women's adornment (vv.9-10) and women's submission and silence in public worship (vv.11-12) are "two sides of the same coin in the cultural settings of the first century A.D., which assumed male dominance and a belief in women's subordination and inferiority."<sup>93</sup> To come full circle, Scholer says that Paul's use of Eve to warn against a specific issue with false teaching was highly selective, as evidenced by his choices in other Scriptures.<sup>94</sup>

### *Conclusion*

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<sup>88</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 197.

<sup>89</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 198. See examples 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 3:12; and Titus 1:6.

<sup>90</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 198.

<sup>91</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 199.

<sup>92</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 201.

<sup>93</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 202.

<sup>94</sup> Scholer, "1 Timothy," 210. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul uses Eve to warn both men and women of false teaching. Also, in Romans 5:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 Paul attributes both sin and death to Adam, not Eve.

We know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8) and the word of our God endures forever (Isaiah 40:8). But the word is also alive and active (Hebrews 4:12). As time moves forward, and the cultures around us advance and change, it is important to continue to evaluate our understanding of Scripture and how best to apply it to our lives within our current context. Sometimes our culture can cause our understanding of Scripture to shift, but we also recognize that we must not ever shift our view of Scripture simply to match the culture around us. Sometimes the two are at odds, and the authority of Scripture must be maintained. It is also important to realize that at times we take our approach to Scripture for granted. We may hold a view of Scripture simply because that is what was taught or passed on to us. There is great value in reexamining key issues to see if our understanding holds merit, or if we need to adjust our understanding based on new information and new perspectives.

The Christian & Missionary Alliance is in the midst of a time of reexamination concerning our understanding of women's roles in ministry. A tension exists between open-mindedly reconsidering our scriptural positions in light of our current cultural climate and perhaps changing our perspective, while being sure to remain primarily faithful to Scripture regardless of what our cultural pressures exist to do otherwise. Our culture has been so impacted by the feminist movement and gender equality, that it does not always sit well to uphold a position that seemingly restricts women. We must be careful not to cause unnecessary offense to our culture, or as John Stumbo stated, unnecessarily limit people from Kingdom service. On the other hand, we are faithful to God alone, and not culture. So if we find that the culture is offended by our biblical mandates, we must still remain faithful to those mandates.

It is difficult to evaluate the overarching theme of the role of women in ministry because of the level of complexity and nuance that arises. Understanding the restriction passages is

influenced by whether we believe them to be the rule, to which women in ministry named in Scripture are the exception, or whether those women in ministry are the rule, to which the restrictions are the exceptions. Whether or not women are to submit to men, or only wives to husbands, is determined largely by the circumstances each letter is addressing. However, we are left to do our best to determine those circumstances from the letters themselves. Even our understanding of the order of the creation of Adam and Eve comes into play, but it is difficult to decisively state whether this implies an authority hierarchy or not.

There seems to be merit to the idea of husbands having authority over wives, although even this is debated by scholars. While some have argued that Galatians 3:28 is a necessary starting point for a discussion on the role of women in the church, perhaps Ephesians chapter 5 would be a better place to begin. To start with the Galatians passage seems to take a soteriological statement and force it to speak into a socio-cultural issue. The Ephesians passage, as we will see, deals directly with the issue of wives submitting to husbands in a way that, no matter what you think of headship or the authority of a husband over a wife, will be practically lived out the same way.

As we saw, David K. Lowery asserts that the word Paul uses for submission in 1 Corinthians 14:34, “when it occurs elsewhere in the New Testament with specific reference to a woman, it always refers to a married woman who was to be subject to her husband.”<sup>95</sup> So submission of women to men seems to be constrained to the marriage context. Regarding the debate of the headship (*kephalē*) of husbands to wives, the key to moving forward can be found in Ephesians 5:22-24 where Paul instructs, “wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should

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<sup>95</sup> Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” 541.

submit to their husbands in everything.” Some cursory observations include a call not for women to submit to men in general, but for a wife to submit to *her own* husband. The husband here is called the head of the wife, but so too Christ is the head of the church. There is certainly no discussion over whether the church should submit willingly to Christ, and yet debate continues over the submission of wives to husbands. Further, the wife is called to submit—willingly—to her own husband. The husband is not called to force her into submission.

Regardless of the true meaning of *kephalē*, or the reason for the call to submission, the practical end result should be the same – wives are called to submit themselves to their husbands. Likewise, we must not overlook the call to husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church! The call for wives to submit to their own husbands falls under the umbrella declaration for the church at large to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (5:21) and both calls to submission are expressions of being “filled with the Spirit” (5:18). This does not make the idea of “submission” more palatable to all, but understood in its ideal (again being filled with the Spirit), it becomes a beautiful expression of Christ and the church (5:32).

Women are named throughout the New Testament as serving in many church roles such as deacons, workers, and coworkers, and the restrictions appear to be in response to cultural or circumstantial situations. However, there does not seem to be any indication that there were female elders. The qualifications given for elders (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5) seem to address men exclusively, perhaps even taking for granted that it was understood that elders would be men. Whereas the qualifications for deacons are addressed to both men and women, the qualifications for elders make no such distinction. Men seem to be addressed exclusively for this position. Imperfect and perhaps uncomfortable as it may be, the current stance on women in

ministry seems appropriate—maintaining male eldership and allowing women great latitude to operate in their spiritual giftedness and calling under the authority of those male elders.

What do we do with the title “pastor”? On the one hand, words, and especially titles, matter. And therefore, the benefit of allowing women the title “pastor” matters. But on the other hand, words matter. And the title carries weight because it implies position. If we have determined that the position of elder is restricted to men, we should be careful not to go beyond our attempts at cultural relevance and inadvertently communicate female eldership. Another tension that exists is that we should not resist change based solely on slippery slope fears. However, at the same time, once we allow women certain roles and titles, it would be difficult—if not impossible—to reverse that decision without doing irreparable damage to the denomination, not to mention many women who would be adversely affected.

The passages that instruct on limitations for women - 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 1 Corinthians 14:33-40; and 1 Timothy 2:9-15 – are each highly contested. What issue they were written in response to, as well as more intricate details such as the most accurate meaning of individual words and ideas, are all heavily debated. Thomas R. Schreiner addresses 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 as one of the more difficult texts regarding men and women about which “scholars debate virtually every aspect of the text.”<sup>96</sup> Likewise, he calls 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 “another very difficult text.”<sup>97</sup> And about 1 Timothy 2:11-15, which he asserts has drawn the most attention, he points to “a dizzying array of alternatives...proposed to explain the Pauline prohibition.”<sup>98</sup> Perhaps it is in this uncertainty that we find the key understanding. It is admittedly an argument from silence, but if God had a clear and undebatable position on women in ministry, would He not have made that position clearer? Perhaps less important than *what* we

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<sup>96</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 11.

<sup>97</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 16.

<sup>98</sup> Schreiner, “Paul,” 21.

decide as a denomination is *how* we decide it, in love and unity, filled by the Holy Spirit, humbling ourselves to serve the other.

As we move forward in this conversation, should heed the request of John Stumbo: “Hold to your convictions, but accept the fact that other Jesus-loving, Bible-honoring leaders and congregations have come to different conclusions. And they have a place at the Alliance table as well.”

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