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Women in Ministry

Introduction/Rationale:

An examination/analysis/antithesis/synthesis using scriptural interpretation

The issue of women in ministry has one been one of the most heated topics the church community has had to address in contemporary Christian culture. From the inception of the church to the present time, this discussion concerning the appropriate roles for women in ministry continues. The underlying questions that are being asked are, “Should women be allowed to have the same privileges in ministry that their male counterparts have?” and “Should they hold leadership positions?” These questions continue to be unresolved and debated. In referring to Jesus, Keener notes, “What is more striking is his acceptance of women as actual disciples – something few, if any, other rabbis did.”

There have been significant changes that have taken place in society, such as the formation of major movements in which women have asserted themselves in society: The First National Women’s Rights Convention (1849), The Women Suffrage Movement (1869), the Nineteenth Amendment which gave women the right to vote, and finally The Equal Rights Amendment which was reintroduced and finally passed by Congress in 1972;. As a result of these societal changes, women in the church community have also been asserting themselves and have desired to be treated as equals. Today many religious organizations are reexamining their rules, regulations, and by- laws in order to determine which roles women should have in ministry, and whether or not women should be denied specific positions of leadership, such as

pastors in the body of Christ. I will attempt an explanation from an analytical perspective as to why women have played important ministerial roles in the church since time immemorial.

Women have contributed greatly to the ministry of the church throughout its history; however, their roles in ministry have not been clearly defined. At times, inconsistency and ambivalence have prevailed; they have not been appreciated or readily acknowledged. Elizabeth Clark says, “The most fitting word with which to describe the church Fathers’ attitude toward women is ambivalence. Women were God’s creation his good gift to men—and the curse of the world. They were weak in both mind and character—and displayed dauntless courage, undertook prodigious feats of scholarship.”¹

Many churches, today are discussing the place of women in their ministries, and some have defined specific roles for women with limitations placed on these roles, in some denominations. However, the New Testament gives very little information about the ordination of women, and indicates that those in ministry were gifted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. Therefore, according to the New Testament, any believer male or female who is called and is gifted by the Lord can exercise ministry. Some are set apart in positions of leadership, while others are given specific assignments as the need arises in the body of Christ. In his article, “Women in Ministry,” Craig L. Blomberg writes,

Scholars agree that one religious leadership role in ancient Israel was uniformly reserved for men—the priesthood....Only Aaron and his male descendants would occupy this one office, (Exod. 28, Lev. 9)...Beyond this office, however, there do not appear any other restrictions on women in public leadership in ancient Israel. While they often remain the exception, women did at one time or another play every other significant role.²

With the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, the priesthood came to an end, thus removing the limitation that denied women equality in participating in this particular office. Therefore, based

¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 15.

² Craig L. Blomberg, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, eds. James R. Beck and Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 133.

on the removal of this limitation women should be allowed access to every area of ministry since all believers are all equal in Christ (Gal. 3:28).

Historical Context:

From the beginning to present time (Old Testament, New Testament, Reformation, First and Second Great Awakenings, 20th and 21st Centuries)

Women in the Old Testament at times had a working relationship of equality. The story of Abraham and Sarah showed that there were times when Sarah was the one in the position of leadership in the house: in the home, the private setting, Sarah was the dominant figure who made the household decisions and Abraham in one specific incident was instructed by the Lord to listen to whatever Sarah told him to do (Gen. 21:21). Meanwhile, in the public arena, Abraham displayed his leadership; this showed that in ancient times even though the male figure seemed to be in the leadership positions, there are times when women were permitted to step into the positions of leadership. Scripture clearly teaches that at times women functioned in the capacity of leadership.

In the Old Testament, there were prophets and prophetesses, and Miriam, the sister of Aaron and Moses, was a prophetess. Miriam led in the worship of the LORD after the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea (Exod. 15:20–21). Deborah was another example of a woman who held a position of leadership as a judge in Israel. She is described as “a prophetess, the wife of Lao-i-doth, she judged Israel at that time” (Jud. 4:4). Deborah was the one who rose to prominence in Israel as a wife, a teacher, and a judge and not her husband. There is no evidence to support the claim that Deborah held this prominent position because there was no male figure available, or no one was willing to fill the position. What is noticeable is that Barak, the military leader, was not willing to enter the battle without being accompanied by Deborah. Deborah informed him that as a result he would “incur the shame of having a woman kill the

opposing general, Sisera, rather than accomplishing the feat himself (vv.8-9). Deborah thus acknowledges the patriarchal context, even while breaking one of the traditional modes and leading her people in exemplary fashion.”³

Also, Huldah was a well-known prophetess. All that is known of her is recorded in 2 Kgs. 22:1–20 and 2 Chron. 34: 22–28. Though there is little information about Huldah, we know that she is recognized as a prophetess for the messengers of Josiah who went to Huldah to enquire of the Lord. Thomas Schreiner notes “The dignity of women is often portrayed in the OT. We think of the courageous life of Sarah (Gen. 12–23), the faith of Rahab (Josh. 2), the commitment of Hannah (1Sam. 1–2), the devotion of Ruth (Ruth 1–4), Abigail’s gentle but firm rebuke of David (1 Sam. 25), the humble faith of both the widow of Zarephath (1Kgs. 17) and the Shunammite woman (2 Kgs. 4), and the risk-taking faith of Esther (Esth. 1–10). As the author of Hebrews writes ‘time will fail me’ (Heb. 11:32) were I to narrate the lives of OT women and others I have skipped over.”⁴

During the early church period during Jesus time to the fifth century, there was much persecution, imprisonment torture and death, yet during this period, women who followed Jesus were strong in their commitment, in their numbers and in their steadfastness, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene among others were involved in the early church and Jesus’ ministry. Lydia and Mary hosted churches within their homes, Junia was an apostle, Phoebe was a deacon, Dorcas a widow, and Priscilla, a missionary and teacher. Some women like Perpetua were martyred for their faith. Women were seen within the Greco-Roman period as being subservient Dzubinski and Stasson write: “Just as twenty-first century culture forms one of the lenses people

³ Blomberg, “Women,” 134.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, eds. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2005), 272.

today look through as they study scripture, so Greco-Roman culture formed one of the lenses for the biblical exegetes in the first centuries of the church.”⁵

Women in the New Testament period were generally considered to be subordinate as well as inferior to men in every area of life. They were expected to be good wives who remained at home and to be good managers of the household. James S. Jeffers writes,

Aristotle says that the husband’s rule over the wife is like an aristocracy, because he is more capable to rule and thus superior to her. But the husband still gives her areas to control within her ability.” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.10). He also says that ‘the male is by nature fitter for command than the female’ (*Politics* 1.12). By contrast, the New Testament passages above do not assert that the husband in any way is superior to his wife or more capable of making decisions; rather they say that God has put him in this position.⁶

Jesus however, by his teachings highlighted the importance of women by including women in the service of the Lord. John Temple Bristow writes, “Jesus set the example for his church. He taught both men and women (Matt. 14:21, 15:38), and he received praise from a woman who heard him (Luke 11:27). Women were among his followers, making the long journey on foot with the male disciples (Matt. 27:55; Luke 23:49, 55), and many of these women were mentioned by name in the Gospels.”⁷ Women were frequently mentioned among the followers of Jesus in the gospels. The prominence of such women in the early church as the deaconess Phoebe (Rom. 16:1), Priscilla (Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19), and Mary (Rom. 16:6) among others indicate that women had important functions in the early church. Hence, we read that Philip had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9), also there were prophets in the church at Corinth that exercised the prophetic gift as well (1 Cor. 11:5). Women continued to exercise

⁵ Leanne M. Dzubinski and Anneke H. Stasson, *Women in the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 3.

⁶ James S. Jeffers. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 87.

⁷ John Temple Bristow, *What Paul Really Said About Women* (New York: Harper One, 1988), 53.

various gifts within the early church and there was no distinction made between men and women in the exercise of gifts.

Concerning the place and importance of women in the early church Bristow writes, “The importance of the place of women in the church is indicated by the fact that Paul (then Saul) arrested both men and women believers: ‘But Saul ravaged the church, entering house after house, dragging off both men and women and delivering them to prison’ (Acts 8:3).”⁸

During late antiquity and the Middle Ages, some viewed women’s leadership as “mothers, sisters, empresses, and queens who lived virtuous lives themselves and inspired their family members to do the same.”⁹ Their positions played important roles in shaping the practices of theology and how the church developed in Western Europe. Leanne Dzubinski and Anneke Stasson assert,

Three Western queens, Clotilda, Bertha and Ethelberga played a major role in the Christianization of Europe by facilitating the conversion of their husbands and the wider population to the Christian faith... Nuns contributed to the mission of the church by copying books, founding medieval hospitals and providing support for their wider community through prayer and charitable work.¹⁰

The Beguines, who were a religious lay Christian order, lived in communities like nuns. They served the poor but did not take vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience. Many of them and other women devoted themselves to a religious life in the 13th century. Scholars referred to them as “the Women’s religious Movement.”¹¹ During this time, some Beguines and nuns began having visions, which they shared with the church for the edification of the body.

The Reformation period of the sixteenth century in Europe, which began after Martin Luther nailed his Theses to the church door in Wittenburg, Germany, was one of unrest and

⁸Bristow, *Paul*, 55.

⁹ Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women*, 8.

¹⁰ Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women*, 8.

¹¹ Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women*, 8.

upheaval. Western Europe began to examine the rituals, rules, and traditions that had been established by the Roman Catholic Church. Celibacy and monasticism, the foundations that the Catholic Church had established to promote leadership among clergy and nuns of the medieval era had been abolished with the Reformation. This had a negative impact on the role of nuns in ministerial and leadership positions. The result was that nuns returned to their family homes or married, with the expectation that they would become dutiful and obedient wives and devoted mothers.

However, many people, from aristocrats to peasants, were impacted by Luther's justification by faith. Many people saw it as a time to be free from the teachings and doctrines of the Roman Catholic faith. Included among these people were women, many of whom were educated, intellectual women of great standing. Some were former nuns, like the wife of Martin Luther, Katharina Von Bora of Germany. Others were aristocrats, like Anna Reinhard Zwingli, the wife of Ulrich Zwingli of Switzerland, and Marguerite De Navarre, and Reneé de France, both from France. Some were of royalty, like Elizabeth Tudor, Lady Jane Grey, and Katherine Parr. Katherine Parr wrote a devotional book "Lamentation of a Sinner," and Elizabeth Tudor translated a French devotional book into English. As the Queen of England, she was also the head of the Church of England.

Although they could no longer directly minister themselves, women fulfilled ministerial roles by supporting their husbands in ministry, reviewing manuscripts, distributing bibles, providing shelter for refugees, and educating children. The only denomination that allowed women to preach during this historical period was the Anabaptist.

By the eighteenth century, the United States was experiencing the First Great Awakening (c.1725 – c.1775). This was a moment and a movement that redefined religion in the United

States. John Howard Smith states, “The First Great Awakening cannot be understood properly without its being recognized as a transatlantic phenomenon, the roots of which lie in Europe with branches stretching across North America...their transmission to colonial British America mark a turning point in the history of Protestant Christianity, and are the source of redefinition of Protestant theology...”¹² Masses of people converted as they were evangelized. In the introduction to *Women in Ministry*, the editor, Robert G. Clouse, states that “this revival began among the Dutch Reformed Churches and then spread to other groups such as the Congregationalists in New England where it produced the most notable preacher of the age, Jonathan Edwards.”¹³

The shift in doctrine was from faith and good works, to justification by faith. As a result, many women became involved in the revival movement. The leader emphasized “All people, including women who were born again through faith in Christ were supposed to witness to others.”¹⁴ During this period of the First Great Awakening, a Rhode Island woman, Sarah Osborn, was preaching during services that were held in her home.

The second revival was the Second Great Awakening (c.1790 – c.1840). This movement began fervently in the Southern United States. Like the First Great Awakening, the doctrinal rationale was the same; “All of these movements emphasized direct communion with God, the leading of the spirit, and the call to ministry over and above clerical counsel, church bylaws, and ordination...the higher priority placed on spiritual gifts left the door ajar for women in missionary.”¹⁵

¹² John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Refining Religion in British America, 1725 – 1775* (Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 18.

¹³ Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse, *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 14.

¹⁴ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 15.

¹⁵ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 15.

The First and Second Great Awakenings were led by evangelical Protestant ministers. During the Second Great Awakening, there was an increase in public interest; this was in sharp contrast to the earlier position that had been taken, which reflected a reluctance to have women take leadership roles. Women became more actively involved, with hundreds of women preaching. “Many estimate that two-thirds of the converts during this ‘Second Great Awakening’ were women under the age of thirty. Perhaps due to this influx of women into the church, the nineteenth century became in an even more pronounced way the age of women preachers.”¹⁶

Opponents of the Great Awakenings felt a threat to the status quo and to tradition; they feared Bernard Weisberger notes that “There was something fundamentally dangerous about this movement, something that made for upheaval, uprooting good and bad alike.”¹⁷ Many new denominations developed during this period, including free Black churches, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Keener notes that Wesleyans, Methodists, and Holiness emerged in the 1800s, with the Pentecostals and Salvation Army emerging by the 1900s.¹⁸ Some historians mention a Third and a Fourth Awakening from the 1850s to the period of the late 1960s and even into the early 1970s.

Roles of Women Within the Context of Ministry: 1800s to Present Times with Specific Examples of Women and their Contributions

In the 1800s, many colleges, seminaries and missions were started. As a result, women were given the opportunity to be educated and to actively participate in spreading God’s word.

¹⁶ Robert G. Clouse, “Introduction,” in *Women Ministry: Four Views*, eds. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989), 15.

¹⁷ Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River: The Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact upon Religion in America* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1958), 60.

¹⁸ Craig S. Keener, “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, eds. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 244.

By the mid-1800s, many colleges, like Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, offered a three-year course, with the third year focusing on religious studies that included ecclesiastical theory, evidence of Christianity and natural theology.¹⁹ Although few women were engaged in teaching, there were some exceptions. Betsy Dow, in 1837, was teaching at Newbury Seminary in Vermont and Anna Oliver and Anna Howard Shaw, who both taught at Boston University. The former was the first woman to receive a Bachelor's degree in Theology, in 1876, from a Methodist seminary.²⁰ By the late 1900s, women were serving as pastors in congregations in the Northeast, particularly in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.

During the 19th century, not many women were preaching, however, their impact was great; women like Lucretia Mott, preached at Quaker meetings, in the United States. Some women like C. Foote who started that rights originated from God supported the rationale that there should be no reason to doubt that women had equal abilities.

Betsy Stockton a freed slave went on mission to Hawaii. As the nineteenth century progressed, in Boston, Congregationalist and Baptist women joined forces and organized the Women's Female Society for Missionary Purposes, and in New York City, the Women's Union Missionary Society of America was started in 1859. Within some years of hearing of the Second Coming Julia Evelina Smith translated the Bible five times: from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew which she taught herself. Her translations were the first by a woman, printing and most of the editing was done by women. In her article, "The First Feminist Bible: the Alderney Edition, 1876," Madeleine B. Stern states:

Hers was the first English translation of the entire Bible by a woman. She had it published in 1876 as part of the nation's centennial, to show "what a woman was capable

¹⁹ Mary Lyon, "Mount Holyoke Female Seminary," *Old South Leaflet*, no. 145 (1835): 5, <https://compass.fivecolleges.edu/object/mtholyoke:46878>.

²⁰ Jannette E. Newhall, "There Were Giants in Those Days," *Nexus* 19, no. VII/I, (Nov. 1963): 17-23.

of doing.” That printing was the first “set up” by type-setting machines (operated by a woman); a woman did the extensive proof reading.²¹

Antoinette Louisa Brown Blackwell was the first woman who was ordained as a Congregationalist preacher. She graduated with a degree in Theology from Oberlin College but under the agreement there would be no formal recognition of the degree. Although Oberlin was viewed as progressive, their educational goal for women was still limited.

Oberlin’s attitude was that women’s high calling was to be the mothers of the race, and they should stay within that special sphere...If women became lawyers, ministers, physicians, lecturers, politicians or any sort of “public characters” the home would suffer from neglect...Washing the men’s clothing, caring for their rooms, serving them at table, listening to their orations, but, themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages, the Oberlin “coeds” were being prepared for intelligent motherhood and a properly subservient wifehood.”²²

In 1850, she spoke at the First National Women’s Rights Convention. In 1851, she was given a license to preach by the Congregational Church and subsequently a Master’s position in 1852 at the church in South Butler, New York. Her family was supportive but tried to encourage her to pursue another vocation. She wrote:

My mother finding how determined I was begged me at least to carry on my work in some foreign mission. My father gave me to understand that his assistance would cease with my college education at Oberlin and my brother, then a minister, would not assist me to do what he considered an impossible work.²³

Brown was ordained by Luther Lee, Methodist minister who was a very vocal advocate for women to have the right to both leadership and education in theology. He could not in good faith not ordain her, since that would deny oneness in Christ.

Jarena Lee was born in New Jersey in 1783. At the age of seven, she was sent away to be a servant. She was influenced in her youth by the aftermath of the Second Awakening, and the

²¹ Madeleine B. Stern. “The First Feminist Bible: The ‘Alderney’ Edition, 1876,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, 34, no. 1 (Jan. 1977): 23-31.

²² Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College: From its Foundation through the Civil War* (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1943), 292.

²³ Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography* (Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1983), 4, 31.

religious fervor that ensued. This period was also a significant and emotional time for slaves and freed Blacks in the United States. Jarena had visited the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, which had been founded by Richard Allen, who had bought his freedom and had opened the church in Philadelphia, PA, after having faced racism at a predominantly white church. Jarena was inspired by Rev. Allen; eventually she received the Lord and was baptized after receiving her own awakening.

Jarena has recorded her 1807 divine call in her 1836 spiritual biography as follows: “To my surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I distinctly heard, and most certainly understood which said to me, ‘Go preach the Gospel!’ I immediately replied aloud, ‘No one will believe me.’ Again I listened, and again the same voice seemed to say, ‘Preach the Gospel; I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends.’ At first, I supposed that Satan had spoken to me...Immediately I went into a secret place, and called upon the Lord to know if he had called me to preach...when there appeared to my view the form and figure of a pulpit, with a Bible lying thereon, the back of which was presented to me as plainly as if it had been a literal fact.”²⁴

She experienced dreams and visions and felt she had been called by the Lord. She married a Methodist minister and moved to Maryland. Because of doctrinal rules and regulations, she was not allowed to preach, but was allowed to hold prayer meetings. However, she was upset that she could only hold prayer meetings. Eventually, because of an incident in the AME church one Sunday, Rev. Allen allowed Jarena to preach. She was the first Black woman to preach in the United States. She was an itinerant preacher throughout Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. Although not formally educated, she opened her own church and wrote her autobiography, which she published in 1833. The introduction of her book begins with Joel 2:28, “and it shall come to pass...that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”²⁵

²⁴ Jarena Lee, “The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee,” in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women’s Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 35.

²⁵ Lee, “Jarena Lee,” 27.

Catherine Booth (1829 – 1890) is an example of equality in ministry. Along with her husband, William Booth, Catherine founded The Salvation Army in London, England. She became known as the “Mother of the Salvation Army” and she believed that women were not naturally inferior to men and that there was no conceivable reason to prevent them from preaching publicly. “Here is not the semblance of inferiority or subjection. Woman was a help meet for man, created to be his companion, assistant, and friend...”²⁶ She was a leading defender for women’s right to preach. She too, like Jarena Lee, was an itinerant preacher at first. She was a great missionary, feeding the poor in London’s East End. She was an eloquent orator and a prolific writer.

Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford (1829 – 1921) was the first woman “regularly ordained” as a Universalist minister in New England, and the first woman “who ever, as a regularly appointed chaplain, officiated in the Legislature of Connecticut State.”²⁷ Hanaford stated, “Every woman is a daughter of the Almighty God, as every man is his son. Each was created in the divine image and for each one path of duty and destiny is the same.”²⁸ She noted that throughout there might have been different work assigned. “He has given them varied labors, but the same capacities for intellectual, social and moral advancement in the way belonging to the individual as a unit in the great sum of humanity.”²⁹

In his book, *The Education of Betsy Stockton: An Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom*, Gregory Nobles writes extensively about the life of Betsy (Betsey) Stockton (c. 1798 – 1865). Nobles writes that Stockton lived in Princeton, N.J. and that, according to a sign outside of the Witherspoon Street Presbyterian Church, she “began life as a slave for the prominent Stockton

²⁶ Catherine Booth, *Female Teaching: Is It Scriptural for Women to Preach & Teach* (London: G. J. Stevenson, 1859), 9.

²⁷ Phebe Hanaford, *Daughters of America* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1883), 448.

²⁸ Hanaford, *Daughters*, 19.

²⁹ Hanaford, *Daughters*, 20.

family in Princeton.”³⁰ In his article, “Betsey Stockton: Stranger in a Strange Land,” John A. Andrew writes that Stockton gained her freedom at the age of twenty, and in the winter of 1816-1817, she “publicly professed religion, was baptized, and joined the Presbyterian Church.”³¹ Shortly after, in 1822, she sailed with a group to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) after receiving an invitation by the Reverend Charles Stewart.³² She was the first African American teacher of the first mission school for “the education and training of chiefs’ domestics and dependents,” in Lahaina.³³ Andrew writes of the enormous significance of Stockton being given this occupation.

The mulatto woman now had reached a plateau equivalent to that of many white women in New England; she had become a schoolteacher. During the early nineteenth century teaching school remained one of the very few respectable occupations for young American women who sought employment outside the home. In an age when the mere instruction of blacks occasioned excitement and hostility even in New England, the appearance of a black schoolteacher working alongside her white counterparts was unusual.³⁴

Upon her return to the U.S. in 1825, Stockton continued her work as an educator and her dedication to her Christian faith. In 1846, she helped to establish Princeton’s First Presbyterian Church of Color.³⁵ In 1848, it was renamed The Witherspoon Street Church, and it still stands today.³⁶

Arguments /Debates: Egalitarian View vs. Complementarian/Traditionalist View

The argument as to whether or not women have been equally called has been an on-going debate in the religious community and especially among evangelicals. This debate has been

³⁰ Gregory Nobles, *The Education of Betsey Stockton: An Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 3.

³¹ John A. Andrew, “Betsey Stockton: Stranger in a Strange Land,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962 – 1985) 52, no. 2 (1974): 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23327601>.

³² Andrew, “Betsey Stockton,” 158.

³³ Andrew, “Betsey Stockton,” 161.

³⁴ Andrew, “Betsey Stockton,” 161-162.

³⁵ Andrew, “Betsey Stockton,” 165.

³⁶ Andrew, “Betsey Stockton,” 165.

highly controversial and hotly contested, one that has involved the bible, history and every practical concern, when examining and analyzing the position of women in ministry. Should women be in ministerial roles? Should women be allowed certain positions of leadership in the church? Is a woman biblically allowed to preach the word of God? Can a woman teach an adult bible class which is comprised mainly of men? Can woman be a pastor? Can a woman be a bishop when the scripture teaches that a bishop is the husband of one wife? What defines a ministerial role? These are some of the questions that the church has faced and has had to address over the centuries; it has been a constant and ongoing argument.

1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–36 are at the core of the debate. In his lecture to theology students at Laidlaw College in New Zealand on December 13, 2019, theologian Craig S. Keener posits, “Where does the bible evidence point?”³⁷ Keener presents the argument that there were political, social, and cultural events occurring in the churches at Ephesus and at Corinth, respectively, when Paul wrote 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–36. Keener dismisses the complementarian view that used the two texts to support the exclusion of women from ministry.

In refuting 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 14:33–36, and 1 Corinthians 11:14, Keener notes that Paul was making reference to cultural norms at the time regarding women. For instances, wearing a head covering was the custom of married women, to identify them as married and to show that they were not flirting. Keener notes that it is evident that in regards to women being silent, there was no indication that women were shouting from balconies, since synagogues did not have balconies. Also, many prayers meetings were held in the homes of widows. He is suggesting that during the Greco-Roman period in 1 Timothy 2:12 is making reference to women being silent at lectures. He emphasizes that boys were educated in the Torah,

³⁷ Craig S. Keener, Video lecture to theology students at Laidlaw College, New Zealand, Dec. 13, 2019.

but not women, who had no education after age fourteen, with some exceptions. As a result, when women went to lectures, they would ask questions. Some questions were considered ignorant, some embarrassing, either to the lecturer or to the woman, and they disturbed the lecture. Therefore, when Paul spoke of women being silent it was not to prevent women from being in ministry and a religious reason, but for a cultural one. To prevent embarrassment for their husbands or themselves, women should inquire of their husbands, in the privacy of their homes. This was indicative to the law and traditions, cultural in regards to women and their relationship with their husbands.

Some complementarian scholars hold fast to the belief "...that they may not teach or hold (or usurp) authority."³⁸ Keener notes that the text does not mention with any specificity different types of bible teaching, or whether it is just in regard to senior pastors. There were no senior pastors at that time or any hierarchy of pastors. He highlights that Paul believed that prophets and apostles were highly regarded and ranked higher than church leaders, therefore a preacher would be of a lower rank. Also, Paul supported Phoebe (Romans 16:7) as well as prophetesses, thus, indicating that this is no evidence of authority being usurped. He adds that in today's culture, many denominations, if they do hold a complementarian view, do not hold to it fully, since there is congregational singing, where women are choir directors and lead service.

Many theologians today, such as Craig Keener, who support the argument for women in ministry, note the history of women's service throughout Christianity. The supporters note the humanitarian efforts that women have put forth to educate and inform others of God's word. We note the prophetesses of the Old Testament such as Deborah, Judges 4, Miriam, missionaries in the New Testament, and ministers in the present time.

³⁸ Keener, "Women," 218-219.

Therefore, what does Paul mean in 1 Timothy 2:12? Is this the only text where Paul specifically prohibits women and admonishes them to be quiet? Is it that the specific meaning seen in Romans 16: 1–2 reveals that Paul has had a working relationship with Phoebe of Cenchrea. Keener takes the position that this is evidence that Phoebe has worked in the vineyard and Paul has been pleased with her performance, so pleased that he has entrusted her to deliver letters to the Romans and has referred to her as a servant and “a succourer of many.” This first century Christian woman was a woman in ministry, and ambassador, a missionary who was spreading the word of God. She was an emissary to the church in Rome, sent on Paul’s behalf.

Keener notes that Rome and Philippi were more progressive cities than for example Ephesus and Corinth therefore women were respected there. As a result, they recognized this and felt empowered. In Acts (16:11–40), is recorded the involvement of women in the establishment of the church in Philippi. It appears Philippi did not have a large Jewish population and there was no synagogue, therefore Paul and his companions went outside the city gate by the river where there was a place of prayer. The women who had assembled, heard the message of Paul and believed. One of the women in this meeting was Lydia whose home became the center for the church in Philippi. John Temple Bristow notes,

“In Paul’s letters, he acknowledged the value of women leaders within the churches. Some years after leaving Philippi, he wrote to the congregation, there entreating two women leaders, Euodia and Synthche to end a dispute between themselves. The fact that he named these women indicates their importance within the church; moreover, he also described them as ‘one who struggled beside me in the gospel, along with both Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life’ (Phil. 4:2–3).”³⁹

Keener dismisses the complementarian view that humans have different but complementary roles and responsibilities only in regard to marriage and family life. Craig S. Keener along with many theologians of today, who support the argument for women in

³⁹ Bristow, *Paul*, 56.

ministry, take the opposing view, an egalitarian perspective. In his rejection of the complementarian argument, Keener uses scripture passages to repudiate the complementarian view that women should not hold leadership positions in the church. He notes the history of women's service throughout Christianity, and the humanitarian efforts that women have put forth to educate and inform others of God's word. He uses both Old Testament and New Testament books to show evidence of women in prophetic ministry from the beginning. We note the prophetesses of the Old Testament such as Deborah, Judges 4, Miriam, missionaries in the New Testament, and ministers in the present time. He points to: Huldah and Deborah, the prophet judge. In the New Testament he shows that couples are paired to do ministerial work: Simeon and Anna, Agabus and Phillip's daughters.

As a servant of God, Paul requested and beseeched that she should be welcomed and received as such. Likewise, in Romans 16:6, he asked that Mary, Junia and others who labored for Christ even before him should be greeted and embraced; this is evidence that Paul worked and supported women in ministry. Paul again beseeches those at Philippi, to support those women who had labored with him in spreading the gospel (Phil. 4:2–3).

His argument begs the question, "Why is it that there are still more men in ministry than women?" He argues that context and culture dictate that 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–36 apply to specific situations within the congregations at Ephesus and Corinth. Therefore, they do not contradict those who take an egalitarian stance. However, he notes that "if we can accept women as prophets and other ministers, there is no reason to exclude them from pastoral office."⁴⁰ In addition, he states, "Today we can recognize a different social setting—one

⁴⁰ Keener, "Women," 223.

that allows more Gentiles to minister; today's different setting also invites more women to embrace the roles some had begun to embrace already in the NT."⁴¹

Linda L. Belleville, like Craig S. Keener (although they differ in some areas), presents an argument in support of egalitarianism for women in leadership. She notes that the question of gender equality has already been acknowledged, and notes the general acceptance of women possessing spiritual gifts. In her examination and analysis, she observes that mainstream denominations have accepted women in leadership roles. However, evangelical churches have not, "While mainstream denominations embraced gender equality, evangelical churches by and large have not. It is the rare evangelical church that has a woman in the pulpit on Sunday morning, a woman as lead pastor, a female chairperson or chief elder of its council or a female teacher of its Bible class."⁴² Belleville argues that the lack of women in leadership roles in evangelical bodies is a result of a hierarchical tradition. In regards to that position, she posits the following question and response. "God created men to lead; God created women to follow? It is this that fundamentally differentiates a traditionalist from an egalitarian today."⁴³

Belleville lists four rhetorical questions which she notes are germane to the debate. "Does the Bible teach a hierarchical structuring of male and female relationships? Do we find women in leadership positions in the Bible? Do women in the Bible assume the same leadership roles as men? Does the Bible limit women from filling certain leadership roles?"⁴⁴

She refers to the Bible in order to refute the teachings and beliefs of the traditionalist or complementarians. First, she examines the relationship in Genesis 3:1–3; she examines God's creation. In so doing, she notes that God created male and female for the purpose of pro-creation.

⁴¹ Keener, "Women," 223.

⁴² Belleville, Linda L. "Women in Ministry," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, eds. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 23.

⁴³ Belleville, "Women," 23.

⁴⁴ Belleville, "Women," 24.

“Be fruitful and increase in number.”⁴⁵ However, that was neither the only purpose nor the primary reason. She observes that authors of the New Testament cite the main purpose was that “they [male and female; the two] will become one flesh” (2:24, Matt. 19:5–6; Mark 10:7–8; Eph. 5:31).⁴⁶ Belleville uses this to explain the unity or oneness of male and female, in essence, a form of “union between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32),” for they “are no longer two, but one (Matt. 19:6).”⁴⁷

When examining the translation of the Hebrew word for “helper,” traditionalists (2:18–20) cite the meaning as “subordinate.” It therefore translates that since the male receives a helpmate, he is superior and the helpmate or helper becomes subordinate. Thus, the male assumes the authoritative role and is therefore superior. Belleville rejects this notion, stating that God is a helper; he provides help to man, but he is not subordinate to man. “I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my *help* come from? My *help* comes from the Lord, The Maker of heaven and earth.”⁴⁸ It begs the question, “Is God now the subordinate?”

In supporting the egalitarian view of women in leadership, Belleville affirms that the main ministerial role was that of prophet. She, like many who take the egalitarian perspective, note “Besides Miriam and Deborah, there was the prophetess God instructed Isaiah to marry (Isa. 8:3); the prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs. 22:14), who was active during the time of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:2), Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1), Nahum (Nah. 3:8–10), and Habakkuk (Hab. 1:6); and prophetesses during exilic (Ezek. 13:17–24) and postexilic (Neh. 6:14) times. Like their male counterparts, both faithful and unfaithful ones could be found.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Belleville, “Women,” 25.

⁴⁶ Belleville, “Women,” 25.

⁴⁷ Belleville, “Women,” 25.

⁴⁸ Belleville, “Women,” 27. (Emphasis added by author.)

⁴⁹ Belleville, “Women,” 35–36.

Women were in the mourning ministry. They were used as professionals. “The prophet Jeremiah refers to professional female lamenters, who were paid to mourn at funerals and other sorrowful occasions (Jer. 9:17–18).”⁵⁰ Another form of ministry which Belleville mentions is, women “who served at the entrance to the tabernacle (Exod. 38:8, 1 Sam. 2:22).”⁵¹ It is believed they served as guards at the entrance.

Women in ministry increased dramatically during the period of the New Testament. During this time, church women served “as apostles (Rom. 16:7), prophets (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5), evangelists (Phil. 4:2–3), patrons (Rom. 16:2), teachers (Acts 18:24–26; Titus 2:3–5), deacons (Rom. 16:1, Tim. 3:11), prayer leaders (1 Cor. 11:5), overseers of house churches (Acts 12:12; 16:14–15; Col. 4:15), prayer warriors (1 Tim. 5:5), and those who were known for their mercy and hospitality (5:10).”⁵² According to Belleville, the increase in women in ministry may have been due to what Paul “succinctly spelled out in 1 Corinthians 14:26: ‘When you come together...each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction [didachen], a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.’”⁵³ Belleville believes that Paul felt that the early church should operate all-inclusively.

Schreiner rejects Belleville’s egalitarian argument which he believes is rooted in the culture of the period and therefore must be refuted. He notes that “the reason Paul prohibits women from teaching or exercising authority over men is rooted in God’s intention from creation.”⁵⁴ However, Linda Belleville documents the enormous evidence of women leaders during the age of antiquity, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. She sees some irony in

⁵⁰ Belleville, “Women,” 36.

⁵¹ Belleville, “Women,” 36.

⁵² Belleville, “Women,” 36.

⁵³ Belleville, “Women,” 37.

⁵⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, “A Response to Linda Belleville,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, eds. James R. Beck and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 109.

the fact that women were fully immersed in ministerial roles during those periods and today some denominations are still denying women the right to minister and more so leadership roles.

Alvera Mickelsen, in her support of the egalitarian view, states that “God calls women to every area of service. He calls in Old Testament times, in New Testament times, in all times up to and including present.”⁵⁵ She asserts that Paul did not hold a traditionalist view, although he was brought up in the tradition of the law. “Paul writes in Gal. 1:14 that he had *persecuted* the Christians precisely *because* he was so zealous for the traditions of his fathers. In Colossians 2:8 Paul warns Christians to beware of becoming prey to human tradition ‘and not according to Christ.’”⁵⁶

She contends and agrees with Culver and the traditionalist view that women will mainly continue to work in the home and in helping professions within society. However, her stance is that there should be no reason, no obstacle in the way of women using their spiritual gifts. “Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:19–20, ‘Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophesying [according to 1 Cor. 14, prophesying includes preaching, teaching, evangelizing].’”⁵⁷ Mickelsen believes “The common reluctance to interpret the Bible with the literary, historical and cultural context in mind has led to the alignment of the church with dreadful causes.”⁵⁸ However, “can anyone deny pastoral or teaching ministries to these women who have been called by the Holy Spirit just as we have?”⁵⁹

Conclusion

⁵⁵ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 64.

⁵⁶ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 60.

⁵⁷ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 64.

⁵⁸ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 63.

⁵⁹ Clouse and Clouse, *Women*, 61.

Some believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–36 make specific references to specific instances regarding the church and possibly marriage, others put forward the theory that maybe women should not shout, maybe it was a reference to women being prohibited from praying publicly, speaking in tongues. Or was Paul contradicting himself?

I am in agreement with the consensus that God has called women to ministry, and there should be alignment with the scripture. All have been called to ministry, both men and women; each has a unique gift: some are called to teach, some to minister, some to evangelize. For almost two millennia, women although banned, prohibited and excluded historically from preaching, and holding leadership positions in the church, have found alternative ways to deliver their messages and they have used various platforms to do so. Women have taught, they have prophesied, they have written books, they have been choir directors, they have been missionaries, they have been song leaders.

Those who have supported women in ministry believe that it has been divine inspiration, others believe it is because they have been embraced by their communities, others believe it is because of recognition given by the church's hierarchy. Whatever the rationale, it is evident that there have always been women in ministry, from biblical times when they were prophesying to the present times where they are preaching from the pulpit in many denominations. In whatever form they have taken, there has been both local and global impact. Many obstacles and cultural biases have been surmounted and surpassed in order to spread the gospel. The fight continues. In their book *Women in the Mission of the Church Their Opportunities and Obstacles through Christian History*, Dzubinski and Stasson note that women have given faithful service to God for centuries, over two thousand years, and they have contributed greatly to the spread of Christianity in every conceivable way and era. Women have been actively engaged in the

spreading of God's love and his gospel message. "Women as a group have made massive contribution over two millennia to the mission of the church. Yet their story is hardly known. The efforts they have made to spread the Christian faith, the trials they have endured for the sake of their faith, the fidelity they have shown in the face of opposition, and the persistence with which they have obeyed God's call is all too often tragically over looked."⁶⁰

Phebe Hanaford noted, "The pulpit will never reach its sublimest power until woman takes her place in it as the free and equal interpreter of God."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Dzubinski and Stasson, *Women*, 5.

⁶¹ Hanaford, *Daughters*, 494-495.

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