

Position Paper on Women in Ministry Mike Falkenstine

Admittedly, there is perhaps not a more debated issue in the church today than the issue of women serving as pastors/preachers in ministry. But as Bible-believing Christians, we must hold Scripture as our highest authority and must give an account when we stand before God for what we teach. This position paper is an attempt to clarify Scriptural teaching on this issue.

The best place to start this paper is to put the qualifications of a pastor/elder in the context of all that the Bible has to say. First, God made men and women equal, yet different. (Gen. 1:26–27). Secondly, in the Old Testament the senior spiritual leadership of God's people were male priests. Thirdly, although he befriended, taught, loved, honored, healed and included women in his ministry, but never in a senior position of leadership, Jesus chose twelve men as his apostles. Fourth, in 1 Timothy 2:11–3:5 Paul writes:

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

This statement of Paul's in 1 Timothy included controversial language for his day – that women should learn theology. In our modern day, this principle can be applied to mean that together, both men and women should be taught theology, be permitted to attend Bible College or seminary, and be encouraged to be theologically astute. When Paul was writing to Timothy, Timothy was in Ephesus and it seems like the women in Ephesus were misbehaving in an disrespectful and unruly way during church services. We see parallels, by the way, to the women in Corinth, to whom Paul also commanded to act respectful toward church leadership (1 Cor. 14:33-35). In our 1 Timothy passage, quietness does not mean total silence but rather a peaceable demeanor, which is also required of everyone in 1 Timothy 2:2. It seems clear that God's intention is for Christian women to be well-informed theologians and to do so by first learning to respect the male pastors that God has appointed to instruct them.

In 1 Timothy, Paul strongly commands women to not teach or have authority over men in the church. While Paul's command seems quite straightforward, a wide variety of interpretive options has emerged.

There are some who would hold a hard complementarian interpretation of Paul's command and would state that women simply can only teach women and children. There are others, like myself, who would hold a soft complementarian take on Paul's commands who believe that his connecting of teaching and authority refers to the highest authority of the church.

Admittedly, there is a very large controversy about the meaning of Paul's uses for 'authority,' but I like to keep it clean by simply using the standard Greek lexicon definition: "To assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate," which describes well the elder-level authority in the church.ⁱ This seems to me to make the most sense given the context, because of what we read in the

next chapter of 1 Timothy, describing the requirements for elders/pastors, which includes being an upstanding husband, father and a mature Christian man.

There are many "objections" to this view of women in ministry / women pastors. A common one is that Paul restricts women from teaching because in the first century, women were typically uneducated. However, 1 Timothy 2:11-14 nowhere mentions educational status. If education was a qualification for ministry, the majority of Jesus' disciples likely would not have been qualified. A second common objection is that Paul only restricted the Ephesian women from teaching (1 Timothy was written to Timothy, who was the pastor of the church in Ephesus). The city of Ephesus was known for its temple to Artemis, a false Greek / Roman goddess. Women were the authority in the worship of Artemis. However, the book of 1 Timothy nowhere mentions Artemis, nor does Paul mention Artemis worship as a reason for the restrictions in 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

A third common objection is that Paul is only referring to husbands and wives, not men and women in general. The Greek words in 1 Timothy 2:11-14 could refer to husbands and wives. However, the basic meaning of the words are men and women. Further, the same Greek words are used in verses 8-10. Are only husbands to lift up holy hands in prayer without anger and disputing (verse 8)? Are only wives to dress modestly, have good deeds, and worship God (verses 9-10)? Of course not! Verses 8-10 clearly refer to men and women in general, not only husbands and wives. There is nothing in the context that would indicate a switch to husbands and wives in verses 11-14.

A fourth objection is that women were not seen as equal to men in the first Century times in which Paul lived. In reading 1 Timothy 2, it has always gripped me that it seems like Paul is anchoring his reason in the created order by referencing and going back to Adam and Eve and the account in Genesis 2 and 3. By Paul mentioning that the reason women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church is that Adam was created first, then Eve, Paul clearly removes the mandate of v. 12 from being culturally motivated. So, 1 Tim. 2:12-13 is not merely a culturally determined truth that can be altered by transferring the verse to the 21st century and stripping away its cultural context. Since Paul dealt with the issue of teaching authority and related it to the creation of Adam and Eve, we can see that women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church. Although the nuances of the arguments vary of those who oppose Paul's clear teaching that only qualified men should be elders/pastors, by tying the Genesis account of creation to the prohibition of women teaching and having authority, Paul also disqualifies the insistence that male leadership in the governments of home and church are rooted in humanly defined culture and not in God-defined creation. Therefore, they will purport that this doctrine should change with culture rather than remaining constant.

Yet another frequent objection to this interpretation of women pastors/preachers is in relation to Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Priscilla, Phoebe, etc. - women who held positions of leadership in the Bible. This objection fails to note some significant factors. In relation to Deborah, she was the only female judge amongst 13 male judges. In relation to Huldah, she was the only female prophet amongst dozens of male prophets mentioned in the Bible. Miriam's only connection to leadership was due to her being the sister of Moses and Aaron. The two most prominent women in the times of the Kings were Athaliah and Jezebel - hardly examples of godly female leadership.

A final objection occurs while mentioning Priscilla and Aquila. In the Book of Acts, chapter 18, Priscilla and Aquila are presented as faithful ministers for Christ. Priscilla's name is mentioned first, likely indicating to some that she was more "prominent" in ministry than her husband. However, Priscilla is nowhere described as participating in a ministry activity that is in contradiction to 1 Timothy 2:11-14. Priscilla and Aquila brought Apollos into their home and they both disciplined him, explaining the Word of God to him more accurately (Acts 18:26).

The position I'm arguing for is complementarianism. A complementarian church should encourage women to use the spiritual gifts and natural abilities that God has given them to their fullest extent. This includes anything from leading a Bible study, overseeing a ministry, leading as a deacon, speaking in church in a way that is not preaching, leading worship music, serving Communion, entering into full-time paid ministry as a member of the staff, and receiving formal theological education—basically every opportunity in the church except what the Bible and the elders deem elder-only duties. Therefore, the issue is not whether a woman can be in ministry, but rather what ministry a woman can be in and remain faithful to Scripture. It is clear to me that the only restriction on women in church ministry is that which is Biblically reserved for men whose lives meet the standard to the elders: Only elders preach, enforce formal church discipline, and set doctrinal standards for the church.

ⁱ ["Authenteno," in A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. (BDAG), edited and revised by Fredrick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)]

Postscript: Three Major Camps on Women in Ministry:

<u>Egalitarian</u>	<u>Complementarian</u>	<u>Hierarchical</u>
<p>Men and women are partners together in every area of ministry. All ministries and offices in the church are open to men and women. Gender is not a relevant distinction for excluding any person from any church office.</p>	<p>Men and women are partners in every area of ministry together. Women and men are encouraged and equipped to fulfill all ministries and offices of the church with the singular exception of the office of elder, which the Scriptures require to be a male-only office.</p>	<p>Women and men are created to operate in different spheres of ministry within the church. Women are not permitted to be an elder or deacon, serve Communion, teach men, lead worship, pray or speak in the church service, etc. Women should focus on building ministries for other women and children.</p>

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this position paper mine and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any church or group where I may speak. Although I believe this position paper is Biblically accurate and represents the full measure of what the Bible would say about this topic, I also realize that people who I believe to be fully devoted followers of Jesus may disagree with me on my conclusions on this topic.