

Women's Roles in the Church

Egalitarian View – Men and women are equal in essence AND function.

Complementarian View – Men and women are equal in essence, differ in function.

1) What does the Bible say?

I. Hermeneutical Principles

1) Scripture does not contradict Scripture

“What is clear in the Bible interprets what is cloudy.” - Kathy Keller

2) Every text must be understood in its historical, cultural and social context.

In other words, what was the author's intent in each book, passage, and sentence, and what did it mean to the original hearers.

“We may need to practice obedience to his commands in creative ways, reflecting the changed contexts in which we find ourselves, but that rarely presents any real hurdle. God gives unalterable commands, (true in every age and culture) but he also gives us freedom to obey them in culturally diverse ways.”

- Kathy Keller

II. Some key passages

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Context: In the Greek *“head covering”* likely means having the hair tied up. Women were letting their hair down **as they were speaking to the whole group** as an intentional act of rebellion. When a woman let her hair down in public it would have been perceived by many as a sexual provocation even akin to that of prostitution, which actually was a real problem here.

(One of Paul's issues with the Corinthian church is that they were flaunting their Christian liberty. He is reminding them that reacting to this chauvinistic culture by “giving it the middle finger” is not what it means to be a Christian. The women who were removing their head covering were consciously discarding a traditional marker of gender distinction. It was also symbolic of bringing public shame upon your husband. **So, they were losing their non-christian audience when they did this and in fact bringing shame on the Church in this culture.** The Corinthian Christians had enthusiastically embraced the early Christian tradition that our identity is ultimately in Christ and not being male and female, and they were seeking to do away with their gender as ultimate identity. **That teaching grew out of Christianity! This teaching that men and women were equal would have been seen as extremely liberal in Greco-Roman culture, and THAT scandal Paul wants to maintain. But no need to push the envelope where it wasn't necessary.**)

A. Paul recalls them to perceive worship as a corporate action of the community **that requires complementary participation by all.**

1. Paul assumes women will have roles in the worship service.

a. In this culture, the man distinguished himself from woman by leaving his head uncovered when praying or prophesying/speaking during corporate worship.

b. **Paul assumes that women will be speaking too. He doesn't forbid this, instead he tells them the proper way to speak in order to maintain their dignity and their distinct but complementary role.**

Context of the New Testament: Jesus and Christianity in that day was like militant feminism.

⑩ Jesus is constantly speaking and hanging out with women, even “unclean women” like the

woman at the Well.

⑩ It's women in the Bible who are given voice in a culture where they were voiceless. It's women who stay with Jesus to the very end and are the first to the tomb. **If the NT were just a group of men fabricating a story about a risen Savior, they WOULD NOT have had women as the primary witnesses in a culture where their word wouldn't even hold up in a court of law.**

⑩ It's women that start and are leaders in some of the early NT churches.

⑩ And this doesn't begin in the NT. You have women prophets in the OT like Deborah, you have women in charge like Esther, you have female heroes mentioned in the very lineage of Christ like Leah, Ruth and Rahab.

Context of the Old Testament

⑩ **Gen. 2:18b - "I will make him a helper corresponding to him."**

* same essence/stuff but different (Trinity)

a. "helper" - word used for God! (Ps. 54:6) (Heb. 13:6)

b. *regularly used to refer to military reinforcements. (US @ Normandy) The woman brings strength, she comes to save the day.*

B. Something else about these head coverings

* In (v. 10) the woman has authority over her own head (not a man or husband) and Paul is speaking directly to her (not through a man or her husband – which would have been radical once again in this culture, AND IN SOME CHRISTIAN SUB-CULTURES TODAY), but he's speaking directly to women to say take charge over your own head and stop letting your hair down to be respectful WHEN YOU SPEAK/PROPHESY IN CHURCH.

C. (v. 11) Hinge verse – WE NEED EACH OTHER EQUALLY

1. Paul is actually balancing out v. 7,9 with vv. 11-12 – man came 1st but also it's man who comes from woman through childbirth and we all find our source in God.

2. Men and women are in a position of equal submission before God in public worship.

1 Corinthians 14:33-38

Explanation: Given what is going on in ch. 11 Paul can not mean that women can't say anything in public gatherings. In 1 Corinthians Paul is not condemning the public ministry of women, but regulating it. Not to mention that elsewhere women were prophets of God. At Pentecost Peter quotes Joel 2:28-29 "Your sons and daughters will prophesy...Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit...and they will prophesy." Phillip the evangelist had "four unmarried daughters who prophesied." (Acts 21:9) What Paul is arguing for the most there is that men and women must maintain gender distinction in public ministry.

There are certainly examples in the OT of women leaders and prophets, such as Miriam, Deborah and Huldah. The only public speaking prohibited for women is what is being described in 1 Tim. 2:11-12.

1 Timothy 2:11-12

Explanation: "to teach or have authority over a man" refers to *authoritative* teaching. In other words what is meant here is not two separate ideas but one and the same. ("A woman is not allowed to teach *and* have authority over a man" would probably be the best translation)

So, a woman is not to engage in **authoritative teaching over a man**. Now, what does that mean?

1) Authoritative teaching – a kind of teaching that carried with it an authority in the church not found in other allowable forms of teaching in the church. “*Because this is followed immediately in 1 Timothy 3 by a discussion of the qualifications of elders, I find it unavoidable to come to the conclusion that women were being enjoined to silence (i.e., forbidden to participate) in a function reserved for elders alone – those men tasked with judging personal and corporate faithfulness to the apostolic “deposit” of truth.*” - Kathy Keller

2) What does our church constitution say?

Westminster Confession of Faith

WCF 28

4. There be only two sacraments ordained by Christ our Lord in the gospel; that is to say, baptism, and the Supper of the Lord: neither of which may be dispensed by any, but by a minister of the Word lawfully ordained.

WCF 29

2. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

3. The Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed his ministers to declare his word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use;

PCA Book of Church Order

7-2. The ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church are elders and deacons. Within the class of elder are the two orders of teaching elders and ruling elders. The elders jointly have the government and spiritual oversight of the Church, including teaching. Only those elders who are specially gifted, called and trained by God to preach may serve as teaching elders. The office of deacon is not one of rule, but rather of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people. In accord with Scripture, these offices are open to men only.

The Elder

8-1. This office is one of dignity and usefulness. The man who fills it has in Scripture different titles expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed *bishop* or *pastor*. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and Kingdom of Christ, he is termed *presbyter* or *elder*. As he expounds the Word, and by sound doctrine both exhorts and convinces the gainsayer, he is termed *teacher*. These titles do not indicate different grades of office, but all describe one and the same office.

The Deacon

9-3. To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

9-7. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (BCO 17).

(“The BCO allows for Deaconesses.” - Jack Williamson (one of the framers of the BCO & Moderator of the 1st General Assembly for what became the PCA (originally called the National Presbyterian Church)

(There are numerous churches in the PCA that have Deaconesses who are not ordained but fulfill the role of BCO 9-7)

3) What do I say?

(just my thoughts – anything we do would need to full approval of our Session)

My calling is primarily to preach and teach the Bible and to love and pastor you. Our standard of authority is the Bible. As we submit to it alone, in reverence to Christ, the Bible WILL strip away anything that has been added on due to religious or cultural tradition. It will ALWAYS cause us to be teachable and to be willing to change.

Practically speaking, Jesus was offensive to those on the right and the left, and so is His Word, and perhaps a good litmus test that we are actually following Him and His Word will result in the same.

General Biblical Principle

In terms of a local church's leadership, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 present the office of elder as one for men only. However, even though women are not in an authoratative role in terms of shepherding or preaching there is no other mandated distinction or restriction or seperation of women in the life of the church.

Practical Application

Since God has created men and women with clear physical/biological distinctions, as well as with differing roles in the church, it is right and good for ministry to take place with both sexes but also at times by breaking them up. Furthermore, since there is not to be a woman serving on a local church's Session, it is good for there to be a female staff position who is given specific charge to represent women's ministries to the Session.

Conclusion – **ANYTHING that an unordained man is allowed to do in the life of the church, a woman is also allowed to do.** This includes anything excluding the office and duties of Elder and Deacon which includes preaching in corporate worship (men who are candidates for the Gospel ministry may preach on occaision according to our standards), as well as administering the Sacraments. (which only includes the actual baptism and “declaring of God's word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to an holy use.” (WCF 29.3)