



# Women In Ministry

Troubleshooting | Practical Guidance For Leadership Challenges

## Introduction

The role of women in the church has been long debated by many theologians and laymen alike. It's not likely that this debate will be settled in Christian circles anytime soon. But, as one studies, prays, depends on the Holy Spirit to teach, and submits to the input of others, a position on this issue can arise and be supported by Scripture.

After careful study of 1 Timothy 2:12-15, 1 Corinthians 11:3-5, Titus 1:5-2:5, 1 Corinthians 14:34-45, Acts 18:26 and considering the research and thoughts expressed in several commentaries, it seems clear that men are called to be in the responsible leadership position of elder in the church and that all others are called to be in submission to that authority. Yet, it is also clear that there is much need and importance for the ministry of women in the Church, even to the level of serving in the role of deacon and providing biblical instruction and correction in the proper setting.

## Women As Elders

The prohibition against women serving in the role of elder in the church is strongly emphasized and supported by 1 Timothy 2:12-13 and can be inferred from the elder qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9. To support his position of male eldership, Paul used the Creation order of Adam (the husband) being created first and then Eve (his wife). Paul's argument from Creation used to support this stance for the Church in verses 1 Timothy 2:13 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 has some implications:

- This is a supra-cultural imperative.
- Genesis 1:26-27 makes it clear that man and woman together as Husband and Wife reflect the image of God. This gives each gender equality in value before God because both in unity reflect something of the nature of the Godhead. This is confirmed in the NT in Galatians 3:28.

- As there is an authority structure within the Godhead, so there is also an authority structure within the family with the man being called to servant leadership and the wife being called to willful submission to that leadership.
- Since the church is also called to reflect the image of God to the world, the church must also have an authority structure that represents the Godhead. This authority structure is qualified men as elders/overseers with all others (men & women) in willful submission to their servant leadership.

Wayne Grudem differentiates between prophecy and teaching when he says that "prophecy and teaching are not the same. They are always viewed as separate gifts in the New Testament" and that "prophecy in the New Testament is reporting something God spontaneously brings to mind [new or reaffirming], while teaching is explaining and applying Scripture or the teachings of the apostles."<sup>1</sup>

This distinction is important because it permits a woman to pray and prophesy in the Church, provided she does so as one under authority of and in submission to the elders (1 Cor. 11:5).

But, it also prohibits women from teaching in the corporate gathering as one who is exercising authority over the church. This is what Paul is communicating in 1 Timothy 2:12. The verb *authenteo* "means to act on one's own authority or to act in an autocratic manner. To exercise authority in this way would be to submit to no higher authority in the church."<sup>2</sup> From the context of 1 Timothy 2:1 through 3:15, Paul has in mind the corporate gathering of the Church and what goes on during that time.

Paul could not mean that women cannot teach. We have evidence to the contrary. Acts 18:26 shows Aquila and Priscilla teaching Apollos in a private setting. In Titus 2:3-5, Paul commanded Titus to encourage the older women to teach what is good so the younger women can learn.

This includes Bible teaching to younger women. So, women are not prohibited from studying or expositionally teaching the Bible. These are actions that can clearly occur in women-only groups.

Paul's command in 1 Timothy 2:12 has precisely to do with a woman taking upon herself the authority head during the corporate gathering of the church by expositionally teaching during the corporate gathering. This type of teaching would include authoritatively calling the Church to adhere to doctrinal truths found in the Scriptures. This is also why Paul commanded the women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to remain quiet. By exercising judgment of prophecies, any woman would now be operating in the position of top authority in the corporate setting, which would put her out of line with the Word of God relating to the order of Creation.

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<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne (2012-11-30). *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Kindle Locations 6020-6031). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Constable, Dr. Thomas L. Notes on 1 Timothy 2012 Edition (page 28).

## Summary:

- Men and women have equal value before God. (Gen 1:26, 27; Gal 3:28)
- One way the family and the church are to reflect God is to organize in the authority structure that reflects the Godhead with husband/elders as servant leader(s) and wife/others in willful submission to that leadership. This mirrors the Father as servant leader and the Son in willful submission to that leadership within the Godhead. (1 Tim 2:13; Eph 5:22-25)
- Women are permitted to pray and prophesy in the corporate gathering under the authority of and in submission to the male eldership. (1 Cor 11:3-5)
- Women are permitted to teach/admonish/challenge men in a private setting. Women are allowed to teach other women, including expositional teaching. (Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3-5).
- Women are not permitted, during the corporate setting, to make judgments on prophecies or teachings. Notice how even Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos **after** his misinformed teaching in the synagogue. (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)
- Women are not permitted to teach as one who is in authority over the church during the corporate gathering. (1 Timothy 2:12)

## Women As Deacons

Can a woman serve in the official role of deacon within the church? There is no agreement between commentators on this topic. Some (Strauch<sup>3</sup>) argue against women deacons while others (Grudem<sup>4</sup> & Constable<sup>5</sup>) give credence to women serving in this role. Strauch's argument stems from his analysis of 1 Tim 2:12-3:15. In his view, a woman deacon may need to exercise authority over a man at times and, therefore, is eliminated from serving in this official role due to 1 Tim 2:12. In his view, the Greek word *gynaikas* in 1 Tim 3:11 is best translated as "deacons' wives" due to this translation minimizing translational and interpretational challenges.

On the other hand, Grudem and Constable recognize that other translations/interpretations are possible, and, in looking at the historical data, conclude that having women deacons within the church who are serving under the authority of and in submission to the male eldership does not violate the prohibition in 1 Tim 2:12 because 1 Tim 2:12 is referring to the function and role of male eldership.

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<sup>3</sup> Strauch, Alexander (2011-02-28). *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Kindle Location 1533-1855). Lewis and Roth Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Grudem, Wayne (2012-11-30). *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Kindle Location 6772-6877). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Constable, Dr. Thomas L. *Notes on 1 Timothy 2012 Edition* (page 44).

On the topic, Constable writes:

"Does this verse [1 Timothy 3:11] refer to female deacons? Historically most interpreters have preferred this view. Others believe it refers to the wives of male deacons. Still others believe it refers to unmarried women who assist the deacons. Exegetically it is very hard to decide. I think it probably refers to female deacons for the following reasons. First, there is nothing about the office as such that would exclude a woman. Second, it seems unusual that Paul would prescribe qualifications for wives of deacons but not for wives of elders. Third, the fact that he inserted special qualifications for women in his list of deacon qualifications seems to indicate that he considered these women as deacons."<sup>6</sup>

Grudem also adds:

"Many people think there were women deacons in the New Testament, while many others think there were not. But in either case, the office of deacon in the New Testament does not include the governing and teaching authority that is reserved for elders."<sup>7</sup>

In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Thomas R. Schreiner writes in his essay entitled, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership: A Survey of Old and New Testament Examples and Teaching" that

"With respect to women deacons, we need not come to a firm decision, for even if women were deacons this does not refute our thesis regarding male governance in the church. Even if women were appointed as deacons, they were not appointed as elders."

It seems to make sense and fall in line with the principles given in the Bible that if the leadership of the church is composed of a plurality of male elders, then any other position in the church, including deacons, could include a woman because she would always be acting under the authority of and in submission to the male eldership. This view is congruent with many commentators on the subject and does not violate 1 Timothy 2:12.

## Summary:

- Exegetically, there is not a clear picture for nor against women serving in the official role of deacon.
- Considering Biblical and historical data, whether women held the office of deacon or not, they served the church faithfully in the function of a deacon.
- Women serving as deacons under the authority of and in submission to the male eldership is in line with God's authority structure in the Godhead and parallels the family.

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<sup>6</sup> Constable, Dr. Thomas L. Notes on 1 Timothy 2012 Edition (page 27).

<sup>7</sup> Grudem, Wayne (2006-08-08). *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Kindle Locations 5516-5518). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

# Conclusions

Two questions remain for Hope Community Church. The answers to these questions are not necessarily clear in Scripture nor do commentators address them specifically.

1. Can a woman serve on a missional community leadership team that is charged with the responsibility of the spiritual development of a missional community?
2. Can a woman teach the Bible in a missional community setting?

These questions are difficult to answer. Constable says, “Paul seems to have been speaking here [in 1 Tim 2:12] of the whole local congregation. I do not think he would have objected to women teaching or leading some groups within the church that we commonly recognize as sub-groups provided they do so with the approval of the male leadership of the church (cf. Acts 18:26; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; Titus 2:3).”<sup>8</sup>

We propose that, if a missional community is considered an autonomous entity, not under the authority of another structure, then women serving on an MC leadership team would be inappropriate because it would confuse the authority structure that is to represent the Godhead and family. In this context, there should be a plurality of male leaders who do the teaching in the gatherings and who make authoritative decisions in leading the group. Yet, a woman could teach a man in a private setting. A woman could serve in other roles that would constitute deacon functions. A woman could pray and prophesy during the gatherings under the supervision and authority of the male leadership of the group. This includes asking questions, sharing testimony, sharing what God has been teaching her in her Bible Study times, singing a song, responding to others’ comments, etc. It would prohibit her from responding to incorrect doctrine and making error corrections with authority. This is reserved for the male leadership of that missional community (Titus 1:9).

On the other hand, if a missional community is considered a sub-group of the corporate church that is under the authority of and in submission to the male eldership of the Church, then it is appropriate for women to participate on the missional community leadership team. In this context, the missional community leaders are serving more as deacons in the church charged with carrying out the mission and vision as set forth by the eldership of the church. It is true that the missional community leadership team has delegated authority from the elders to make decisions in the best interest of the missional community, but those decisions are always in submission to the higher authority structure and would be corrected by the male eldership if such decisions were not in line with the doctrine, mission, vision, and direction of the church.

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<sup>8</sup> Constable, Dr. Thomas L. Notes on 1 Timothy 2012 Edition (page 27).

The question remains of a woman teaching in this context. Consider the following Biblical considerations:

- She is part of a leadership team composed of men and women.
- This entire leadership team is under the authority of the male eldership of the church.
- Missional community teachings are expected to align with the doctrine, mission, vision, and direction of the church as set forth by the male eldership.
- Missional community teachings are differentiated from corporate teachings in their delivery style and authority.
- Weekly corporate teachings are led by the male eldership of the church.
- In Colossians 3:16, Paul exhorts the church: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” The context here seems to be a smaller setting where teaching and admonishing one another is possible, yet big enough where singing together is plausible. This aligns very well with HCC’s missional community settings.
- In Titus 2:3, Paul writes to Titus: “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands...”
- It is not the act of exegetical teaching that Paul prohibits, but the act of taking on for herself the authoritative teaching role in the corporate gathering that Paul prohibits.

As for women serving on an MC Leadership Team within HCC, consider the following:

- HCC’s missional communities are under the direct authority of the Elders.
- Missional community teachings must align with the doctrine, mission, vision, and direction of the church set forth by the Elders.

Due to these various considerations, both Biblical and HCC specific, we conclude that women who are gifted at and aspire toward teaching are permitted to exercise that gift in the context of the missional community setting. In this context, there is a teaching of one another that coincides with Colossians 3:16. In this context, neither the men nor the women have ultimate authority over the missional community, but are under authority of the local eldership.

## Resources

- *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womenhood*, Wayne Grudem
- *Women In The Church*, Andreas J. Kostenberger & Thomas R. Schreiner
- *God's Design for Man and Woman*, Andreas & Margeret Kostenberger
- *Elders and Leaders*, Gene Getz
- *Biblical Eldership*, Alexander Strauch