

Position on Women Teaching

As a non-denominational church, we operate with a practice of unity in essential theological matters and charity in non-essentials. Within that framework, it occasionally becomes necessary to clarify important, but secondary, theological positions and practices in the life of the church - one such position is the role of women in ministry.

We, the elders of The Rim, are **extremely reluctant to place restrictions on women (or men) beyond what we see explicitly outlined in Scripture**. We believe that **the gifts of the Spirit are not gender specific and are given to both women and men** for the building up of the church. Outside of serving in the office of elder, we believe spirit-empowered women can do anything that a spirit-empowered man can do.

To be clear, this has been the historical position and philosophy of The Rim Church since we planted in September 2019. While this has been true, it may not have always been clear in practice, so we desire to provide clarity at this time. As an elder team, we are committed to the authority of the scriptures and the empowerment of all believers to use their spiritually empowered gifts to the fullest. To that end, we have compiled the following position paper to clearly articulate why we practice the way we do at The Rim Church.

A few considerations before we begin

1) Teaching is more than a monologue on a Sunday

When we use the word “teaching,” the first place our mind goes to is a 35ish-minute monologue sermon on a Sunday morning. This is not what the word “teaching” meant in the early church, and it would be overly simplistic to project our context into the text. The “corporate gathering” in the New Testament was more like our modern community group than our large Sunday gatherings. We cannot map or use our current church culture as the lens through which we understand the Bible.

*2) Those who believe women **shouldn’t** teach (in a corporate setting) are not anti-woman, and those who believe women **can** teach don’t ignore the scriptures.*

It is most often the case that those who believe women should not teach do so not out of a desire to silence women, but a desire to be faithful to the faithful interpretation and application of scripture. Additionally, some of the most renowned scholars and biblical theologians in the world who hold to Christian orthodoxy have come to the conclusion that women can teach not despite the scriptures, but because of the scriptures.

3) Arguments should come out of the scriptures, not out of the culture.

With cultural “hot-button” topics, there can be a temptation to simply adopt the cultural narratives of our day and then backfill them with scripture to support the position. Regardless of position, conclusions should come out of the text, not be read into the text of scripture.

4) This is a brief position paper, not a book.

We will not be able to cover every side of the argument and various positions in depth, but seek to give a helpful, robust overarching framework for clarity and further study if desired. This paper is limited in scope: Women teaching and operating in ministry at The Rim under the leadership of the elders.

Old Testament

In the Old Testament, we see men and women presented as equal image bearers who are both called to participate in God's purposes in the world. While there are examples of certain leadership offices being reserved for men, there are also numerous examples of women exercising wisdom, influence, spiritual authority, prophetic ministry, and public leadership with God's blessing and affirmation.

The opening chapter of Scripture establishes the dignity and value of both men and women.

"So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female." (Genesis 1:27)

Both men and women are created in God's image. Both are commissioned to fill the earth, steward creation, and participate in God's work in the world. The text does not present women as secondary image bearers, nor does it suggest that God's mission is entrusted primarily to men. Rather, men and women together receive the responsibility of representing God's rule on the earth. The Old Testament begins with shared dignity, responsibility, and agency to "image" God to creation.

Genesis 2 provides additional detail about humanity's creation. God declares that it is not good for Adam to be alone and creates Eve as a suitable partner for him. Many English translations describe Eve as Adam's "helper." While that word can sound subordinate in modern English, the Hebrew word used here is *ezer*. Throughout the Old Testament, this word is most frequently used of God himself as the helper of Israel.¹

The term does not imply inferiority or lesser status. Instead, it describes someone who provides strength, support, and what is lacking. Eve is presented as Adam's corresponding or complementary partner², one who shares his humanity and stands alongside him in fulfilling God's purposes.

For this reason, we do not believe Genesis 2 presents women as inherently less capable, less gifted, or less valuable than men. Rather, the creation account emphasizes partnership and mutual dependence.

As the Old Testament unfolds, women repeatedly emerge as central participants in God's work among his people.

¹ *The New English Translation adds the following footnote on Gen. 2:18: "The English word 'helper,' because it can connote so many different ideas, does not accurately convey the connotation of the Hebrew word 'ezer. Usage of the Hebrew term does not suggest a subordinate role, a connotation which English 'helper' can have. In the Bible, God is frequently described as the 'helper,' the one who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, the one who meets our needs. In this context the word seems to express the idea of an 'indispensable companion.' The woman would supply what the man was lacking in the design of creation and logically it would follow that the man would supply what she was lacking, although that is not stated here."*

² *Another NET footnote on the word "kynegdo": "Literally means 'according to the opposite of him...' The words 'suitable,' 'matching,' or 'corresponding to' all capture this idea. Translations that render the phrase simply 'partner' [cf. NRSV], while not totally inaccurate, do not reflect the nuance of correspondence and/or suitability. The man's form and nature are matched by the woman's as she reflects him and complements him. Together they correspond. In short, this prepositional phrase indicates that she has everything that God had invested in him."*

In Exodus, God uses the courage and faithfulness of Hebrew midwives, Moses' mother, Moses' sister, and even Pharaoh's daughter to preserve the life of the future deliverer of Israel. The opening chapters of Israel's redemption story are driven largely by the faithful actions of women.

Rahab, a Canaanite outsider, demonstrates remarkable faith and becomes instrumental in Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. *Ruth*, a Moabitess and widow, displays extraordinary loyalty and faithfulness and ultimately becomes part of the family line through which King David and, eventually, Jesus would come. *Abigail* demonstrates wisdom, discernment, and courage by intervening between David and her foolish husband, Nabal. The biblical text presents her as a model of godly leadership and wise action. *Esther* courageously uses her influence to preserve God's people from destruction. Her story highlights God's ability to work through faithful women for the good of his people and the accomplishment of his purposes.

Not every faithful person in Scripture occupies a formal leadership office. Nevertheless, the consistent testimony of the Old Testament is that God frequently works through women in significant and influential ways. The biblical authors repeatedly highlight their faith, wisdom, courage, and obedience as examples worthy of imitation.

Beyond examples of influence and faithfulness, the Old Testament also records women occupying recognized leadership roles among God's people.

Some of the clearest examples of this are Deborah the judge and Huldah the prophet.

Deborah (Judges 4):

Judges 4 describes Deborah as both a prophet and a judge of Israel. People came to her for judgment, she exercised leadership over the nation, and she played a central role in Israel's military deliverance.

The text presents Deborah positively throughout the narrative. In the book of Judges, she is in a position of political, judicial, military, and religious authority. There is no indication that her leadership was improper, sinful, or merely tolerated due to a lack of qualified men. Rather, Deborah is portrayed as a faithful servant through whom God brought wisdom, justice, and deliverance to his people.

Huldah (2 Kings 22):

During the reign of King Josiah, the Book of the Law was discovered in the temple (2 Kings 22). After hearing its contents, the king instructed his officials to seek God's guidance regarding its meaning and implications.

The delegation included some of the highest-ranking leaders in Judah, including the high priest. They sought out Huldah the prophetess. This is particularly noteworthy because other well-known prophets, including Jeremiah and Zephaniah, were active during this same period. Yet the king's representatives were sent to Huldah for insight and interpretation.

Huldah faithfully proclaimed God's word, instructed Judah's leaders, and helped initiate one of the most significant reform movements in the history of the kingdom. The text offers no distinction between the authority of her prophetic ministry and that of her male counterparts. God's word came through her, and the nation's leaders responded accordingly.

OT Summary

Whatever conclusions one draws about leadership in the New Testament church, the Old Testament clearly demonstrates that God was willing to entrust significant spiritual and civic leadership responsibilities to women.

At the same time, the Old Testament does not erase all distinctions between men and women. Israel's priesthood was restricted to qualified male descendants of Levi. Not every man could serve as a priest, but women were excluded from that particular office.

We believe this is an important observation because it demonstrates that Scripture can simultaneously affirm the leadership, gifting, and ministry of women while also reserving certain roles for qualified men.

The existence of a male priesthood did not prevent God from speaking through women, leading through women, or using women to instruct his people. Deborah and Huldah both exercised significant influence despite not serving as priests. For that reason, we do not believe the existence of a male priesthood alone settles every question regarding women and leadership. The entire Biblical text presents a more nuanced picture.

Taken together, the Old Testament does not present women as passive participants in God's story. Rather, it presents women as gifted, faithful, Spirit-empowered partners in God's mission who regularly contribute to the spiritual flourishing of God's people.

Any interpretation of New Testament passages concerning women and leadership should account for the reality that the Old Testament repeatedly affirms God's willingness to speak through, lead through, and work through women for the good of his people and the advancement of his purposes.

New Testament

As we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament, there are two primary texts used to argue why women cannot teach in a corporate setting: 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:12-15

1 Corinthians 14

At first glance, it appears Paul is telling women in the church to be silent and not speak publicly when the church gets together. However, in chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, Paul gives specific instructions to men and women on how they ought to pray + prophesy in public during their gatherings as a church. Therefore, he would be contradicting his instructions if what he means is simply to remain quiet and not participate.

Within the context of the passage, it would appear that Paul is addressing the "judging of prophecy" when he makes the claim of women remaining silent. It is likely, as was common in those times, that the women in the congregation were uneducated and uninformed as to the scriptures. They would not have grown up going to Torah school if they were Jewish OR if they were Greek, the lack of education around the scriptures would have interfered with their ability to interpret and test the scriptures.

This matters because we judge prophecy against the scriptures. Scripture is the basis by which we affirm or deny a prophecy as being from God. As women would not have been informed regarding the scriptures, it would have made them insufficient judges of prophecy being proclaimed by both men and women. So as to steward the time spent together when gathered,

Paul wants these people to ask their husbands at home what happened instead of disrupting this part of their gathering.

1 Timothy 2³

For those who would draw the line of women teaching in a public setting, 1 Timothy 2:12-15 serves as the primary foundation and evidence. This passage serves as the lens through which the previously explored passages are viewed. The difficulty is that this passage is quite difficult to understand and fully grasp. There are many one-offs of language that Paul uses in this section that he does not use anywhere else.

With that said, it is clear Paul is saying *something* in this passage; he is not saying nothing. Our role today is to work out not only what he is saying but what does he *mean*? Both in the immediate cultural context⁴ and the universality of believers following suit.

The center of the text seems to revolve around the words “teach (didaskin)” or “exercise authority (authentein)”. The word for “teach” is a neutral word that simply means “to teach”. The word for “authority” is a difficult word to understand, as there are no other examples of it being used in the New Testament. This is a one-off occurrence, which makes us ask why Paul used this word, and how else this word was used in the larger Greek culture of the day? When we look at how the word was used in the surrounding culture, the most similar case use studies relate it to *dominating* (negative). There *is* a type of teaching that Paul would then be prohibiting women from, this negative, dominating type of teaching. This would have been the practice of instituting the personal will + desire of the individual(s) (woman/women) in this case, over the preference of others. This would be steamrolling others into agreeing with whatever outcome they were hoping to achieve.

To be clear, this does not mean Paul is okay with men leading in this way (he’s not), *dominating* is a negative and not appropriate for either gender. However, Paul was writing to a specific people at a specific place in a specific period of time, and it appears as though the women were teaching in this way and this type of teaching, not public teaching itself, needed to be corrected for the sake of building up the church.

A principle of biblical study and interpretation is to let scripture interpret scripture. When there is a passage that is difficult or might seem to stand alone, we look to the rest of what is clearly defined in the canon of scripture to provide clarity.

³ From *Genesis to Junia* by Preston Sprinkle, Chapter 10 was highly utilized for understanding this passage.

⁴ When looking at the immediate context of the letter, the background setting is the city of Ephesus. The predominant religion / deity in Ephesus at the time was the goddess Artemis. Within the cult of Artemis, there was a theological belief promoted that “Eve” was created before “Adam.” Therefore, Paul’s reference to the creation order would be less of an argument for why women cannot teach, and more of a correction of the false theology that was creeping into the church. In another part of this letter (1 Tim 5:3-16), Paul specifically makes mention of false teaching/beliefs that has come into the church that seems to be impacting the women of the congregation. If this cultural background of the city is true would then the most plain reading of the text could infer that this false teaching is connected to fragments of belief/theology from the cult of Artemis making its way into the congregation and causing harm.

Scholars from both theological camps would agree that the “Artemis Argument” is not a good foundational argument to explain why 1 Timothy 2:12-15 is not prohibiting women from teaching universally, but is rather speaking to a specific cultural audience in the city of Ephesus. While there is not enough in the argument alone to stand on its own, in conjunction with the other evidences in the canon of scripture, it can still be a helpful consideration.

As an elder team, we find the previous OT Testament and upcoming outlined scriptures giving clearer positive examples of women teaching and operating in ministry as being much clearer examples of women exercising the spiritual gift of teaching that then gives a lens to what's happening in this text.

*Why we think women **can** teach:*

If we are going to affirm women using their gift of teaching as a body, we believe there must be texts that speak in affirmation of this, not simply rebutting 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Romans 12:1-8: The gifts of the Spirit (including teaching) are not gender specific, but are open to “brothers and sisters” to operate in as the Spirit gives.

Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20: The message of the resurrection of Jesus is first proclaimed by women to men.

Matthew 28:18-20: Jesus’s commandment to go and make disciples was not gender-specific. In his calling to make disciples, he calls his people to *teach*...

Joel 2:28-32 + Acts 2:1-13: The prophet Joel predicts a day where the Spirit will fill both men + women to prophesy which is the activity of proclaiming the truths of God before others. In the upperroom, we find a mixed group (men + women) of people that are filled with the Holy Spirit - it was not gender specific. Upon being filled with the Spirit, this mixed group proceeds to proclaim “the magnificent acts of God” to a mixed gathering of people. We see here adult women proclaiming the message of God to adult men.⁵

Acts 18:24-26: After hearing Apollos proclaim an incomplete gospel, Priscilla and Aquila invite him into their home and they both teach him more fully the message of the Gospel.⁶

1 Corinthians 11:5: The discussion on head coverings is for a different FAQ document - the point is that Paul gives instructions to women on how they ought to conduct themselves when they are praying or prophesying. Historically and biblically, prophecy is connected to conveying the truth of God to or before others.

Romans 16:1-2: Paul commends Phoebe, calling her a diakonos (servant/deacon) of the church in Cenchreae and a prostatis (patron, benefactor, leader). These are not incidental titles. Paul entrusts Phoebe with delivering his most theologically dense letter to a mixed-gender house church network in Rome.⁷

⁵ *There is a difference between prophecy and teaching, but both require a level of speaking truth on behalf of God in such a way that can affect life change based on the scriptures.*

⁶ *Some would argue this is simply teaching in a private setting. This is true, and we believe this would be an example of teaching not being limited to a “35-min monologue on a Sunday.”*

⁷ *While Phoebe reading this letter is not explicitly mentioned in scripture, the commonplace practice for a messenger of such a letter was to deliver, read aloud, and interpret its meaning in a communal setting. The letter carrier would act as an authorized representative of the author. This does not mean Phoebe was an elder or held governing authority over the Roman churches. But it does mean Paul was entirely comfortable with a woman publicly communicating, explaining, and representing apostolic teaching to the gathered people of God.*

Practice at The Rim

We seek to be faithful to Scripture, to honor conscience within both the elder team and the congregation, and to make generous space for women to exercise their God-given gifts, especially in teaching, without collapsing into either rigid restrictionism or unexamined egalitarianism.

We affirm, equip, and support spirit-empowered, qualified women to use their gift of teaching at every level of our church. As an elder team, we create a spiritual covering and accountability for anyone and everyone who opens God's word when we gather corporately on Sundays — they (both men and women) operate and teach underneath our authority. We believe that when done well, qualified women utilizing their gift of teaching in the corporate gathering is not evidence of the authority of the elders being subverted, but is rather evidence of that authority and covering being practiced. We believe this leads to all of the saints being equipped for the work of ministry, and to an environment in which men and women can use the fullness of their gifts for the fullness of God's glory, the edification of the body, and God's missional purposes in the world.

In summary again, we, the elders of The Rim, are **extremely reluctant to place restrictions on women (or men) beyond what we see explicitly outlined in Scripture**. We believe that **the gifts of the Spirit are not gender specific and are given to both women and men** for the building up of the church. Outside of serving in the office of elder, we believe spirit-empowered women can do anything that a spirit-empowered man can do.

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Resources that were helpful in the research of this paper

- [From Genesis to Junia](#) by Preston Sprinkle
- [Women must be taught to teach](#) by Thabiti Anyabawile
- [Women serving in the church](#) by N.T. Wright
- [All the debates over women teaching](#) by Mike Winger

If you want additional resources to explore more of the arguments for a more complimentary or egalitarian position, you can find those recommended resources [here](#).