

Women in Church Leadership

Introduction: Women in church leadership, preaching, teaching, being pastors, etc. is a very controversial issue in the modern church. This study looks at the Bible's teaching on the issue and sets forth FCC's position with its biblical support. FCC's position is that women are not to be elders/pastors/overseers, exercising authority over the church, or teach men or the church as a whole authoritatively, but that only men should function in these ways.

There is really only 1 passage that addresses the issue directly, but there are numerous passages that bear on it. We will look at the less direct passages first and then finally the direct passage (1 Tim 2:11-15). We will also consider major objections offered by Christians who think that the Bible allows for women to be pastors if time allows.

I. There is a consistent pattern of male leadership throughout the Bible.

A. Gen 2:15-25 – Do you see anything here that indicates Adam as a leader in the first marriage?

1. The woman was created for the man
 - a. Paul makes this point in 1 Cor 11:9 in support of husbandly authority and wives needing to honor it in church.
 - b. Does this mean she is inferior to him? → No, but it gives the man a primary role. He has the leading role among 2 equals. Paul goes on to clarify this in 1 Cor 11:11-12.
2. The woman was created to be the man's helper
 - a. Does this mean she is inferior to him? → No, but it gives the man a primary role. He has the leading role among 2 equals.
 - b. God is sometimes called a helper to man
 1. What does that tell us about the wife being her husband's helper? → Her being his helper does not mean she is inferior to him.
 2. But is there a difference between God and the woman with regard to helping? → God was not created to be a helper, but the woman was created for that role.
 - So doesn't that make her inferior? → No, but it gives the man a primary role. He has the leading role among 2 equals. The man is to lead his wife and family. She is to come alongside him to help him accomplish what God calls him/them to. This does not necessarily mean that's all there is for her. Part of his role as a leader is to nurture her and help her to flourish in all that God has for her. Nevertheless, there is a primacy to the man's calling, and her primary role is to help him in that. There is great latitude in how this all gets worked out.
3. The man names the woman, which is an act that indicated authority in the Ancient Near East.
 - Similar to the fact that parents naming their children indicates authority over the child.
4. When did this all happen? → Before the Fall
 - Why does that matter? → Before human sin. This is God's creational design, not the result of sin.
5. Male leadership in the home is the godly OT pattern – 1 Pet 3:5-6; cf. the “father's household” throughout the OT (e.g., Gen 12:1)
6. In God's creation design, husbands are the heads/leaders of their families.
 - Does this in itself demand that women cannot be the head leaders of the church? → No, but it is a basic part of the truth that there is a consistent pattern of male leadership throughout the Bible and of another factor that argues for exclusively male headship in the church that we will look at later.

B. Government leaders in the OT were normally male → the king and other officials including elders

1. There were occasional exceptions (e.g., the wicked Queen Athaliah [2 Kings 11:1-20]; the judge Deborah [Judges 4-5]), but these were just that, exceptions.
2. OT elders are the OT equivalent of NT elders in their governing role

C. Spiritual leaders in the OT were normally male, i.e., prophets and priests

1. There were occasional exceptions with prophets (e.g., Deborah [Jdgs 4-5] and Huldah [2 Kgs 22:14-20]), but these were just that, exceptions.
2. Critically, there were no exceptions with priests.
 - Why would this be important? → OT priests (and Levites) are the OT equivalent of NT pastors in their

teaching role (Deut 31:24-26; 2 Chron 15:3; 31:4; 35:3; Neh 8:7-8).

- D. Israel as God's people was made up of the 12 tribes of Israel, based on the 12 sons of Jacob/Israel.
– Not necessarily a big deal for the issue except that it has a counterpart in the NT that has some importance
- E. This pattern stretches into the NT, but we will cover the NT material in connection with additional points.
- II. The 12 Apostles, symbolizing the Church as the fulfillment of Israel and who were the highest authority under Christ for the Church, were all male.
- A. This connects to the 12 tribes of Israel as headed up in the 12 sons of Jacob/Israel.
- B. This is not definitive, but it continues the pattern of male leadership from the OT into the very foundation of the Church and continues to set the expectation that church leadership should be male.
- C. The Apostle's roles stretch into eternity – they will sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28) and they are pictured as the foundation of the glorified people of God in Revelation's vision of Heaven (rev 21:14).
- III. God's appointment of men as the head of their families suggests that men should be the leaders of the church family
- A. The church is the household of God; the Church is a family
1. God is our Father, and we are his children and brothers and sisters in Christ (so many passages; e.g., Eph 2:18-19; Rom 8:15-17)
 2. 1 Tim 3:15
- B. God has appointed men as head of their wives and families (Col 3:18-21; cf. Eph 5; 1 Pet 3:1-7)
1. This basic idea is repeated multiple times in the NT. This is just one example chosen because it is concise.
 2. How does it seem for a man to be head of his wife in the home, but then have to submit to her as his authority in the church? → Not impossible, but does not sit comfortably. There is some tension there.
- C. A man managing his family/household well is a requirement for being an elder/pastor/overseer of the church – 1 Tim 3:4-5; Tit 1:6 → Notice the close connection between the family and the Church
- D. What would this all lead you to expect for leadership in the Church? → Male leadership. Confirmed by:
- IV. The NT requirements for elders indicate that elders are male: 1 Tim 3:2 (“husband of one wife”), 4 (manage *his* family); Tit 1:6 (“husband of one wife”) – there are other indications in the Greek text of elders as male.
- A. What is the main difference between the qualifications for elders and deacons? → The ability to teach (1 Tim 3:2 vs no mention of teaching in the requirements for deacons in 1 Tim 3:8-13)
- B. One of the primary aspects of the restriction of women from eldership is restriction from them teaching men
- C. Given 1+2, it is striking that women seem to be allowed to be deacons (though this is debated) but not elders
- V. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 – There's a lot here, but we are only going to touch on what is relevant. We need a whole study for this passage, and I plan to do one sometime.
- A. What is this passage about? → Paul is teaching the Corinthian church that women needed to wear head coverings in worship
- Why? What is his reason? → Praying or prophesying uncovered shames her head/husband.
 - The Greek words for man and woman can also mean husband and wife, which is what seems to be in view in this passage. A woman's head is her husband (or father if unmarried), not all men.
- B. What does it mean to say that a man/husband is his wife's head? → leader, authority, ruler, provider
- Some scholars argue that the word means “source,” but this is unlikely.
- C. So how does wearing a head covering relate to the husband's headship? → It was a way of acknowledging it, and so honoring it, portraying the woman as in submission to her husband as well as indicating sexual modesty (not wearing a head covering in public in Greco-Roman culture signaled that a woman was sexually available).
- D. So how does this bear on the issue of women in leadership in the church? → Not definitive, but women needing to show that they were under the headship of a man in worship again suggests that men should be heading up the church.

VI. 1 Timothy 2:11-14 – Ok, this is the big passage, the one that directly addresses the issue.

A. Verse 11

1. What is the context? Where is this learning taking place? → Seems to be in worship/church → Paul speaking to Timothy about how to run the church; corporate prayer and worship seems envisioned (2:1, 8); church leadership the very next topic
2. Quietness and full submission? → Proper manner of a student; not interrupting; listening quietly with deference and attentiveness to teachers; accepting the teaching (assuming it is true of course!) and the authority of the teacher

B. Verse 12 – The big verse!

1. So what does Paul prohibit here? → Women teaching or having authority over men
 - a. All teaching of any sort? → 2 things suggest the reference is to authoritative teaching in a congregational setting → the word for teaching used here and its coupling with exercising authority
 - b. Having authority over a man?
 1. There is debate over the word for having authority. It is a somewhat unusual word for the time.
 - a. 2 main options (though there are more options): to exercise authority vs to domineer – What's the difference for interpretation?
 1. Exercise authority would mean women cannot exercise authority over men in the church.
 2. Domineer would restrict women from a certain kind of exercise of authority, and would leave the possibility for them to exercise non-domineering authority.
 2. Anything in the text suggest which is in view?
 1. Would that mean that men can teach women in a domineering way?
 2. Given the culture, it seems unlikely that women would have been domineering men. It makes sense that with greater freedom in Christ, women might have thought to take authority.
 3. But most importantly, the connection with teaching, which is a positive activity, suggests exercising authority is a positive activity. In fact, the Greek construction used here expresses the same attitude toward both things joined by the word “or.” Since teaching is positive, so is the exercise of authority in view.
 - c. There is a question of how teaching and authority relate here. 2 main options.
 1. A hendiadys, expressing one concept through combining 2 different words, here = teaching authoritatively
 2. 2 distinct but related concepts – here, exercising authority and teaching as an exercise of authority (i.e., teaching authoritatively)
 3. # 2 most likely.
 - a. The words in a hendiadys are normally closer to one another
 - b. This specific construction in Greek seems to be used with 2 concepts
 2. This verse prohibits women from exercising authority over the church and from teaching men in the church authoritatively, and so therefore also the church generally (because that would involve teaching men in the church). This therefore excludes women from being elders/pastors/overseers.
 - This view is supported by the whole flow of the Bible from Genesis on.
 3. So can women not teach at all? Can they not teach men at all? → They can teach other women (Tit 2:4) and children (2 Tim 1:5). And they can “teach” non-authoritatively and in non-spiritual things.
 4. Notice the repetition of the woman needing to be silent, that is, with respect to teaching the church

C. Verses 13-14

1. What are these verses doing? → Grounding Paul's command/prohibition
 - Do you see any obvious indication of that? → “For”
2. Why would Paul bring up Adam and Eve and the Fall?
 - a. If we go back to what we saw in Genesis at the beginning, because women teaching the (whole) church authoritatively goes against God's creational design for men to lead
 - b. What difference does it make that Adam was formed first? → He was the head
 - Remember that Paul appealed to this point in 1 Corinthians 11?
 - c. What difference does it make that Eve was deceived and became a sinner first? → various suggestions, including the idea that women are more prone to deception. But I would say that it is because that is an example of male headship being violated and it leading to terrible consequences.

d. Wasn't Adam at fault in the Fall? Of course, even more! He failed in his responsibility. This shows why male headship must be upheld.

3. What significance for this principle is there to Paul appealing to creation and the Fall as the reason for his command? → It is trans-cultural. It is not limited by culture. It is a theological reason.

D. Some would object that this passage is limited to a specific situation or that it is limited by culture.

VII. Thoughts/questions?

VIII. Some objections

A. Ministry should be determined by gifts, not gender.

- More fundamentally, all should be in accordance with God's word.
- Women can still do ministry in accordance with their gifting without being in the office of elder/pastor/overseer or exercising authority over the church, or teaching men or the church as a whole authoritatively.

B. If God calls a woman to be a pastor, she should be able to be.

- Since scripture forbids women from normally holding pastoral office, then we can trust that God will not normally call a woman to hold pastoral office.
- Our sense of calling must be subjected to God's word just as our sense of God's leading and God's speaking to us should be.

C. What about all the ministry we see women in the Bible do?

- None of that ministry involved women in the office of elder/pastor/overseer or exercising authority over the church, or teaching men or the church as a whole authoritatively.
- The Bible does not forbid women from doing ministry, including full time ministry. Indeed, the Bible calls women to do ministry. But it bars women from the specific ministry of being an elder/pastor/overseer, exercising authority over the church, and teaching men or the church as a whole authoritatively.

D. This is just cultural.

- The biblical teaching in this area is rooted in trans-cultural, theological reasons. It is largely rooted in God's creational order and design.