



It is becoming more and more apparent that our Trending Now topics are really trending now in our world. May God continue to teach us how to engage with each other and with our world by pointing to the gospel of Jesus Christ as the only source of hope and redemption and power to actually change lives. The Gospel of Jesus Christ was, is and always will be our "North Star" to help us understand how God wants us to engage these Trending Now topics, whether it's race, environment, technology or politics or any of the other topics that are trending now.

You likely remember from your history classes the women's suffrage movement. A great victory for the suffrage movement was in 1920 when women received the right to vote. And with ups and downs our nation has been on a trajectory that is leading to equal opportunity and equal pay for equal work for women. Society continues to debate whether we have arrived at equality of sexes, but it seems like we are continuing to head that direction as a nation.

As a father of two daughters, the issue of equality of the sexes has really mattered to me. It was important to me to preach to my girls that outside of playing in the NBA or NFL, there are no limits they have as females to go as far as they wish in our society. That even though their grandmothers were limited in their educational and income opportunities, they are not. I preached to them that they can do anything a man can do and likely better and with more style. I am so proud of their goals and achievements.

Have we arrived as a society of equal opportunity, equal pay for equal work? Have we arrived? Probably not, but my daughters will tell me we are on the right trajectory thanks to the suffrage movement led by such women as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Canto and Lucy Stone.

This morning we are hitting a different issue related to women. Women in Ministry isn't something our society is even debating. But it is something the church is debating, and that is why we included it as a Trending Now topic. The role of women in ministry is something followers of Christ have different opinions on.

It really shouldn't surprise us that this is an issue in God's church. If we took our cues from the world around us, it likely wouldn't even be an issue. But we are the church and we take our cues from a God full of grace and timeless truth. Truth we find in our Bible. My daughters have asked me why the church and society differ in the role of women. And I have a responsibility to tell them and then support what I say with scripture. Then I get to tell them that women are free in the church to minister according to their gifts and calling under the authority established by God.

Some churches are more conservative and traditional on this matter than we are, while others are more liberal. We will assume that all love Jesus and consider the Bible to be God's Word,

and they're all being used by God to further his kingdom. Part of the reason for these differences is that some of the most difficult passages in the Bible address this issue.

So let's dive into this and learn and get equipped. First, let me outline the three major views on this subject that believers hold. Whatever view we hold, we should hold it with humility and realize that this isn't a litmus test for a person's spirituality or commitment to God's word.

Traditional View

Basically this means that men rule over women in the home and the church. All significant decisions are made by men. The role of the woman is primarily home and kids. They can teach the little ones in church, but they can't do anything in the church or home that would be an expression of leadership over a man.

Egalitarian View

Egalitarian is a fancy word for same. This is the viewpoint that says that men and women are equal not just in worth and dignity, but the same equality applies to roles in the home and church. There is no biblical gender-based roles that men and women specifically fill. They are the same. So women should serve as elders right alongside men in the church.

Complementarian View

This is the view that says while being equal in personhood and dignity, men and women have distinct roles in the home and church. This view speaks to roles in the home and church, not to roles in society. In marriage as well as in the church, men are called to the role of headship, which is expressed through loving and sacrificial leadership. In the church, women can serve in a variety of roles, including leadership roles, but doing so under the headship of male leaders called elders. This is the view we hold at CPC.

Let's look at the scripture to explain our position on women in ministry. In Genesis there are two accounts of the creation of man and woman. In Genesis 1, God created humanity with two distinct genders. *"Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (verses 26-27).*

God says he created mankind. He created mankind in his own image. And he created them as separate genders. The emphasis in these verses is on the equality of man and woman, both being made in the image of God. Together they're blessed by God and commanded to rule over earth as image bearers of God.

In Genesis 2 we learn more about their relationship. The theme moves from establishment of them as equals to the distinctive

roles men and women play. Men and women are equal in value and dignity, but different in role. We read that man was created first, out of the dirt of the earth and God breathed life into him. As good as Adam was as an image bearer, God said it was not good for man to be alone. *“The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (v. 18).*

This is where we begin to see the unique role a woman plays in the life of a man under God. The word “helper” implies a unique role, but it’s not what you might think. It doesn’t mean servant. In fact it is a term of great honor. In the OT, God is often described by the very same word. God is often described as the “helper” of his people. Genesis 2 goes on to say how God created woman out of the man. The man was the source from whom the woman was created. *“The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called “woman,” for she was taken out of man’” (v. 23).*

It’s important to remember that the texts in the New Testament that we will study are linked all the way back to these verses in Genesis. When we understand that the Complementarian view begins back in Genesis, we will better understand how concepts like headship, under authority, and God’s order take shape in the New Testament church. We will see in the New Testament that concepts like headship belong to men.

So in Genesis we see men and women are equal in worth and dignity, but with different roles. They are not designed to **compete** with one another, but to **complete** one another. This truth is reflected all throughout the Old Testament. It’s also important that we understand that God’s plan for men and women was quite progressive in comparison to the cultures that surrounded God’s people. Most cultures viewed women to be the property of men. But the Old Testament teaches that women are to be treated as persons of worth.

Women in the Old Testament

Let’s look at the evidence. God made his covenant with women as well as men. Women were encouraged to listen and learn God’s Word. Women ministered at the door of the tabernacle, offering their own sacrifices. God spoke directly to women. Women could join groups that were set apart in their devotion to God such as the Nazarites. Women held important roles: Miriam and Huldah were prophetesses, Deborah was a judge. As parents women were on equal footing with men. Honor is commanded to both father and mother. In Proverbs a mother’s instruction was as important as a father’s. But we still see a pattern of male leadership in the Old Testament. For instance, a woman could not be a priest, while most other religions had priestesses.

So what did things look like for women between the time that the Old Testament was completed and when Jesus came on the scene? The relationship between men and women deteriorated. There was a rabbi prayer that went like this: “Lord, I thank you that you did not make me a Gentile, a slave or a woman.” Rabbis would not speak to women in public. They held that it was better to burn God’s law than allow a woman to read it or learn it.

Jesus and Women

That’s why, when Jesus came on the scene, the way he treated women was revolutionary.

- His encounter with a Samaritan women in John chapter 4. His disciples were shocked he’d even speak to a woman. Jesus often departed from the norm of his culture by not only speaking to women, but also teaching them important truths. To the rabbis, women were a source of sexual temptation who were incapable of learning. But Jesus shattered that stereotype.
- Jesus called attention to the great faith of several women. He addressed one woman who was healed from being crippled for 18 years as the daughter of Abraham, a title of great honor.
- At a time when women were rarely allowed to even appear in public, Jesus had a band of women who followed him and supported him from their own means. It was primarily women who were present at his crucifixion. Women were not considered to be reliable witnesses in a court of law, but Jesus made a woman—Mary—the first witness to the resurrection.

Yet as radical as Jesus was, he didn’t choose a woman as one of his 12 apostles. Some say that was because of the culture of his day that wouldn’t have stood for that, but Jesus broke cultural barriers all the time. Instead this can be viewed as a biblical pattern of male headship.

Women in New Testament Churches

After Jesus’ death and resurrection we see the same pattern in the New Testament churches. Women played a huge part in the spread of the gospel.

- Acts 1 records that women were among the first disciples in the upper room. The Spirit of God fell on them at Pentecost right alongside the men.
- The first convert to Christianity in Europe was business-woman named Lydia. She was one of the founders of the church in Philippi.
- In Acts 18 we read of a couple, Priscilla and Aquila, who taught the great teacher Apollos. Priscilla’s name usually comes first, which indicates that she was likely a more prominent teacher than her husband.
- In Acts 21 we read of Philip the evangelist who lived in Caesarea with his four prophesying daughters. These daughters spoke forth the word of God with authority.
- In Romans 16 Paul greets several people in the church at Rome, most of whom were women who had labored with him in spreading the gospel. He mentions Phoebe and calls her a “servant.” The word is also translated deacon or minister. It may refer to a formal position of leadership which she had in the church. Paul called her “helper of many.” That word helper is used in the NT to describe “manager.” Phoebe was a manager of God’s household. She wasn’t just bringing a hot dish to potlucks. She was using her spiritual gift to serve in a leadership role in the early church. This is consistent with what the Bible teaches on spiritual gifts. In every passage that teaches on spiritual gifts in the NT, there is not a hint of gender distinction. Women possess all the gifts that men possess like teaching, prophecy, evangelism, exhortation, helps, mercy, giving, administration, leadership and others.

A woman with the gift of pastor-teacher is to shepherd and teach the scripture. Nowhere is she told to do so only with other women and children. Although this is true, the NT gives no examples of a woman serving in the official capacity of Elder. In 1st Timothy 3 and Titus 1, where the qualifications of elder are laid out, it is clearly assumed that the elders are to be men. Women serve as deacons, and deacons lead in their own right, but not in an overall governing sense like elders. This leads us to two of the most controversial and debated passages on this subject. The first passage is 1 Corinthians 11:3-12. ***“But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved” (verses 3-5).***

Paul makes it clear here that there is an order: God and Christ, Christ and man, man and woman. This is the order we saw back in Genesis, further developed by Paul as how it is to be displayed in the public worship of the church. The word for head is translated as authority. In all three uses in this verse we could substitute authority for head. One might look at this and say, “see, the Bible teaches that women are inferior to men.” But that logic falls apart when we see that in no way was Christ inferior to God as the same word is used. It’s about order and roles. Paul instructs the men that they should keep their heads uncovered in church. What was the reason? Paul was sensitive to the culture of the day. I was in a traditional Christian church in Israel a few years back; it was hot, and I was wearing a hat for the sun. I forgot to take it off and sure enough an usher or greeter came up to me and asked me to remove my hat while in the church. I was being disrespectful. Some might say, wearing a head covering was dishonoring because it made me look like a woman in their traditional Christian church.

Next Paul teaches the women. He is saying. “Women, while you are praying and prophesying in public worship don’t forget to wear a shawl as a head covering.” Apparently having long hair hanging down uncovered communicated disrespect, even more he seemed to connect it to being falsely accused as promiscuous. The penalty for a woman who committed adultery would be to made to look like a man and have her head shaved to look like a man as a punishment.

What’s the point? The point is that Paul wanted men and women to remember that even though they were both equally prophesying and using their gifts in public and private they were to stay in their two distinct roles.

In verses 7-12, Paul continues to these two distinct roles, moving from a cultural example to a theological truth that applies not just in Genesis, not just in the first century, but also in the Christian church today. ***“A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”***

Paul defends his concept of headship by the order of creation. His point is woman was created from man, not vice versa, which affirms the concept of headship. In verse 3 Paul’s argument was that man has authority as the head. In verses 7-8 Paul’s argument was that man had the authority being the source of the woman, that woman came from man. That there was a creation order and distinct roles were formed in the garden. That headship was formed in the garden and was to continue down to every generation. That a woman had a unique role that God created her for and that was to bring honor to man because he is the head as authority and source. This is an interesting statement... that the woman has authority to voluntarily honor God’s order of headship he created. And remember, when we live and worship in a way that honors God’s creation plan for family and the church, we are being watched by the heavenly beings who desire the order of creation to be honored for God’s glory.

Paul concludes this section in verses 11-12 by reminding us that while God designed us to be complementarian, men and women are truly interdependent. This is a statement of equality. Women have very important and very public roles in the church to use their gifts to bless everyone in the church. Back in verse 5, women offered prophecy in the church. Prophesying was speaking forth the word of God. In verse 13 he spoke of women praying aloud in church. And what could be more important than leading a body in prayer and worship?

Now guys, this one’s for you... One of the problems some women have with the idea of headship is that men have misused it. Not only is male headship rooted in creation order, and in the structure of the church, it is also rooted in God’s plan for marriage roles. Look at what Paul says about headship in his teaching on marriage in Ephesians chapter 5. ***“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior” (Eph. 5:23).*** Guys, for instruction on headship we are to take our cue from Christ. ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:25-28).***

For Christ, headship meant laying down his life, serving, washing, blessing. Headship doesn’t mean sole decision-making responsibility or wielding unlimited power. It means washing feet! It means caring, not crushing. It means self-sacrifice, not self-assertion. It means love, not pride. And it results in the affirmation and liberation of women to serve the Lord, not the tearing down or controlling women or marginalizing their voice or perspective of in the church.

One more verse that Paul gives us to equip us on how to lead in the church that we need to understand. After reading this some of you will think, What? ***“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Tim. 2:11-12).***

What? A woman must learn in quietness and she must be quiet? To understand these verses, we must allow scripture to interpret scripture. We know that Paul isn’t saying women can never speak in church, because we just read in 1 Corinthians 11 that women are free to pray and prophesy out loud in public worship. In 1 Timothy Paul is prohibiting them from speaking in

an inappropriate manner. Perhaps the women in Corinth and Ephesus had taken their new-found liberation in Christ so far that they were standing up and questioning the elders or even their husbands in church. In that day, men and women sat on opposite sides of the room. Perhaps they were talking loudly to each other across the room, disrupting in some way, maybe giving the church a bad reputation in the community.

What about teaching? What about assuming authority over a man? It's a best interpretation to view these actions to be linked together. And linked together they describe the role of an elder. So Paul's instruction is not that women can never teach. Paul is saying that a woman cannot teach in an authoritative capacity that violates the principle of male headship we have laid out in this teaching.

How does all of this apply to life and ministry at CPC? Keep in mind churches are governed differently, so how this plays out in practice may vary from church to church. Perception plays a role here. What's perceived as a violation of the principle of headship in one church is not in another. But because of who we are as a church and how we are governed, here is how this principle plays out for us.

We believe women are free to serve in the church according to their gifts and calling. This includes teaching other men and leading in ministries. Yet we also believe there's a clear pattern of male headship in Scripture. This headship isn't a reflection of ability or competence, but of the order of creation and the way each gender uniquely contributes to the image of God. So we believe it's clear men alone are to serve in the capacity of primary authority in the church, as elders, and women who lead and teach ought to serve in a way that shows respect for that headship. There are many fine churches where women serve as elders, but that isn't how we understand the Scripture. However, let me add that elders should also recognize the unique perspective and insights of women and seek them out in fulfilling their role.

I want to say a word here with regard to women on our pastoral staff. We believe it's appropriate for us to have women on our pastoral staff because they serve under the direction of the elders. They're free to teach and lead both men and women in their ministries as an expression of their spiritual gifts and their God-given calling. This applies to Sunday morning worship. Because of how we view these roles, we believe women can use their gifts to pray, lead worship, or host here on Sunday mornings. There's no reason why women can't serve in those capacities. I'd even say we're impoverished by not having women do so. We need the perspective that only a woman can bring in these areas. Pamela Heim writes this: "Women can sit through an entire service and not hear a word uttered in a female voice – not in prayer, Scripture reading, or in testimony. Something is tragically amiss when gifted daughters of the King of kings haven't grasped their significance and value. Could it be that the church has failed to grasp their vital role in the kingdom?" I believe we have.

One question I haven't addressed is how we view the Sunday morning preaching in this context. In our church, the preaching of God's Word is at the very heart of who we are. It's the elders' responsibility to ensure this teaching is both relevant and biblical. Whoever preaches in our Sunday services does so under the authority of the elders, whether they're an elder or not. While we believe men should be primarily responsible for the preaching on Sunday mornings, we know there are many gifted women who are excellent preachers, and we want them to be encouraged to use their gifts. Some of these women are on our staff and others are from outside our body. Occasionally, we will be blessed to hear them preach in our Sunday services.

For some of us, this may be hard. This is where we have to be honest with ourselves. Is our comfort level governed by our own personal feelings or by the Scripture? Some who are overly conservative in this area are afraid to loosen up because we associate these things with the liberal church where Scripture is ignored. That's a poor reason to not be willing to change. Some who are on the other side are unwilling to accept male headship because of men who've mishandled their role. That, too, is a poor reason not to be willing to change. Whichever side you're on, I challenge you to confess your prejudice to God and ask Him to help you to be open to what the Scripture says.

There are unique challenges in this for both men and women. Women, it may feel awkward for you at first to use your gifts in some of these areas. It may be threatening for you to have other women do the same. But God calls you to use your gifts. Men, don't make women have to fight for their ministry. Make it easy for them to move into these areas of leadership that may be new.

If you would like to talk further, understand that our elders have been praying, discussing and searching the scriptures to determine where we stand on this issue. Rob Hall, Michael Farbstein and Frank Cutter are your elders, and they wanted me to make sure you know that they are glad to discuss and clarify anything you need on this Trending Now topic: Women in Ministry. You can also pick up a hard copy of our Position Paper on The Calling of Women in Ministry in the lobby. It's also on our website.

I'm convicted that I have to work harder to understand and appreciate the innate value of the Complementarian position. Not just that I need to be more sensitive to the female leadership perspective that God has given us. And not just to give women at CPC a greater voice because it's the right thing to do, which it is. And not just because it will be a unifying thing to appreciate the gifts of all people including women. It's even more than that.

We are not getting a complete picture of the heart of God to help us lead well unless we listen, seek to understand, encourage, and affirm the gifts, passions, perspective, and unique place of empathy that women bring to our church leadership. The Complementarian position we hold at CPC celebrates both gender equality of value and our gender specific roles laid out by God. And without embracing this position we cannot fully know and appreciate the heart of God who is over all.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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