



Our Trending Now topic today is Women in Ministry. This is different from other topics in this series because it's not trending now in our culture, but it is in the church. This really isn't something people out there in society are debating about, but it's an in-house debate; something followers of Christ have different opinions on.

Why is this an issue for us, then? Well, because we take the Bible as God's Word. If we took our cues from the world around us it would be ridiculous to even raise this issue. In the marketplace, just talking about the respective roles of men and women is considered archaic. But we're not talking about the marketplace, we're talking about the church. And the church has always believed in the authority of Scripture. As Christ-followers, we need to build our convictions on the Bible and not our culture or even our own experience. Wherever you're coming from on this issue, I'd ask you to approach the Scripture with an open mind. Over the years my own thinking has been challenged on this issue.

Having said that, this is one of those issues where solid, Bible-believing Christians can disagree. Some are more conservative on this than we are, while others are more liberal. They all love Jesus, they all 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 the differing opinions is because some of the most difficult passages in the Bible deal with this issue. You can pick up three different commentaries and discover each gives a different interpretation of the same passage! So whatever view we hold, we should hold it with humility. Don't make this a litmus test for a person's spirituality or commitment to God's Word. This isn't in the same category as the deity of Christ or salvation by faith. It's an issue where we can agree to disagree and continue to dialogue and learn from each other in a spirit of mutual respect.

Just to begin, let me outline the three major views on this subject that believers hold.

Three Major Views

Traditional view

This basically means men rule over women in the home and the church. All decisions are made by men. Women are to stay home and take care of the kids. At church they can teach little kids and make food for potlucks, but they can't do anything in the church or home that would be expression of leadership over a man.

Egalitarian view

This is the viewpoint that says men and women are equal not just in worth and dignity but the same in their roles. In the home and in the church there are no distinct biblical gender-based roles men and women should play. They are the same. So women should serve as pastors and elders right along side of men.

Complementarian view

This view says while being equal in personhood and dignity, men and women are distinct in their roles in the home and church (not in the marketplace). In marriage and 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 and certain offices, but do so under the headship of male leaders called elders. This is the view we hold at CPC.

So let's take a brief survey of why we take that position. Let's go back to the beginning and start with Genesis.

Women in the Old Testament

In Genesis there are two accounts of the creation of man and woman. In Genesis 1 God creates humanity in 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).**

The emphasis here 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 subdue the earth. So they are equal in relation to God and in their responsibility to care for God's creation.

In Genesis 2 we learn more about their relationship. The emphasis is on the distinctive roles men and women play. They're equal in value and dignity, but different in function. Man was created first, and then 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 points to the unique role a woman plays in the life of a man. The word “helper” implies a unique role, but it’s not what you think. It doesn’t mean servant. In fact, it’s a term of great honor. In the OT, God is described as the “helper” of His people. Genesis 2 goes on to say how God created the woman out of the man. The man was the source from whom woman was created. In the NT, this is interpreted as pointing to the role of headship for men. In Genesis we see men and women are equal in worth and dignity, but with different roles. They’re not designed to **compete** with one another but to **complete** one another. This truth is reflected throughout the OT. Understand in the surrounding cultures women were considered to be the property of men. But the OT defies that and teaches that women are to be treated as persons of worth.

- God made His covenant with women as well as men.
- Women were encouraged to listen and learn to God’s Word.
- Women ministered at the Tabernacle, offering their own sacrifices.
- God spoke directly to women.
- They could become Nazarites devoted to God.
- Women held important roles: Miriam and Huldah was prophetesses; Deborah was a judge.
- As parents, women were on an equal footing with men. Honor is commanded for both father and mother. In Proverbs, a mother’s instruction is just as important as a father’s.
- Nevertheless, we still see a pattern of male headship in the OT. For instance, a woman could not be a priest, while most other religions of the time had priestesses.

Jesus and Women

So that’s what the OT teaches. But between the time when the OT was completed and when Jesus came on the scene, the view of women in the Jewish faith had deteriorated. The rabbis had a prayer: “Lord, I thank you that you did not make me a Gentile, a slave, or a woman.” Rabbis wouldn’t speak to women in public. They said it was better to burn God’s law than to allow a woman to read it and learn from it.

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

- In His encounter with the Samaritan woman, 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 spiritual truths. To the rabbis, women were a source of sexual temptation who were incapable of learning. But Jesus

challenged the stereotype that said a woman belonged in the kitchen and not the classroom.

- He called attention to the great faith of several women.
- He addressed one woman as a “daughter of Abraham,” a title of great honor.
- In His teaching, He used stories involving both men and women.
- At a time when women were rarely allowed to even appear in public, Jesus had an entourage of women who followed Him and supported Him from their own means.
- It was primarily women who were present at His crucifixion.
- Women weren’t considered reliable witnesses in court then, 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 twelve apostles. Some say that was because the culture of His day wouldn’t have stood for it, but Jesus never pandered to people’s cultural sensitivities. I see this as another indication of a biblical pattern of male headship.

Women in the New Testament Churches

We see the same pattern in the NT churches. Women played a huge part in the spread of the gospel.

- Acts 1 records women were among the first disciples in the upper room. The Spirit fell on them at Pentecost right along side of men.
- The first convert to Christianity in Europe was a business-woman named Lydia—one of the founders of the church at Philippi.
- In Acts 18 we read of a couple named Priscilla and Aquila who taught the great Apollos. They’re mentioned often in the NT, and in most instances Priscilla’s name comes first. This is most unusual. It is likely Priscilla was a more prominent teacher than her husband.
- Acts 21 tells of Philip the evangelist who lived in Caesarea with his four prophesying daughters. These girls were prophets. They 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’d labored with him in spreading the gospel. He mentions Phoebe and calls her a “servant.” The word could be translated “deacon” or “minister.” It may refer to a formal position of leadership she had in the church. Whatever Phoebe was doing, it was more than serving brownies and coffee!

So it’s clear women served in a variety of leadership roles in the early church. This is consistent with the Bible’s teaching on spiritual gifts. There are three passages that refer to the

spiritual gifts of believers—teaching, prophecy, evangelism, exhortation, helps, mercy, giving, administration, leadership, and many others. There's not a hint of gender distinction in any of these passages. Women possess all those gifts and they're commanded to use them! A woman with the gift of pastor-teacher is to shepherd and to teach the Scripture. Nowhere is she told to do so only with other women or children.

Although all of this is true, the NT gives no examples of a woman serving in the official capacity of an elder. In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, where the qualifications for elders are given, it's clearly assumed elders will be men. Women serve as deacons, and deacons lead in their own right, but not in a governing sense like elders.

This leads us to two of the most controversial and debated passages on this subject. While we can't look at these in great detail, I'll explain in general terms how we see them.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The first passage is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Paul makes two things clear here. First, the headship of man is to be displayed in the public worship of the church. Paul affirms this in a number of ways. In verse 3 he says, *"the head of the woman is man."* Then he talks about veils in verses 4-6. A woman was to wear a veil, because in that culture failing to do so communicated disrespect. Then in verses 7-9 Paul defends the concept of headship by the order of creation: *"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."* His point is woman was created from man, not vice versa, which affirms headship.

One of the problems some women today have with this idea of headship is men have misused it. Referring to husbands and wives, Ephesians 5:21ff describes the role of headship better than any other passage. It instructs men that when it comes to headship, we're to take our cue from Christ. For Christ, headship meant laying down His life, serving, washing and blessing. Headship doesn't mean sole decision-making responsibility and 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, not the tearing down and enslaving of women.

Another thing to notice from 1 Corinthians 11 is while affirming headship this passage also affirms the ministry and the equality of women. In v. 5 Paul speaks of women offering prophecy in church. In v. 13 he speaks of women praying out loud in church. These are very important functions! As I've already pointed out, prophesying was akin to speaking forth the Word of God. And what could be more important than leading a body in prayer? This passage also affirms in verses 11-12 men and women are

truly interdependent: *"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."* That is a statement of equality.

1 Timothy 2:11-12

The second passage is 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

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.

Notice here women are given the right and privilege of learning. That isn't an issue to us, but in the first century that was unusual. So in a sense this passage affirms the right of women to be educated and to participate in worship.

But notice also women are also prohibited from doing certain things. They're told to be quiet and submissive. What does that mean? Here's where we must allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. We know Paul isn't saying women can never speak in church, because we just saw in 1 Corinthians 11 women are free to pray and prophesy. Most scholars agree Paul is prohibiting them from speaking in an inappropriate manner. Perhaps the women in Corinth and Ephesus had taken their newfound liberation in Christ so far they were standing up and questioning the elders or even their husbands in church. Since women and men sat on different sides, perhaps they were shouting to each other across the room, disrupting the worship and acting in a way that would give the church a bad reputation in the community. Notice Paul tells the Corinthians that a woman isn't allowed to "teach or assume authority in the church." These words, which are to be taken together, describe the role of an elder. This isn't saying a woman can never teach. We know from other Scriptures that women did teach in both the home and the church. It means a woman can't teach in an authoritative capacity that violates the principle of headship. These women were acting in a way that violated that principle.

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.

In all of this, we have to remember Jesus didn't put a lot of weight on believers holding onto their rights. He always emphasized taking a back seat and serving. Don't forget that as we speak about rights and equality and roles. The world fights for equality and vies for roles. But that shouldn't be true in the church. Our relationships ought to look different from the world's. So in the end, whether you're a man or a woman, the issue isn't seeking your significance in a role, but rather in relationships defined by love and humility. My prayer is this would mark us as a church.

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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