



We are blessed with great female leaders in our world. Take a minute to think about some of the women who have inspired you in your life. Maybe she was a political leader who encouraged you with her actions, or an educator who challenged your thinking, or a young lady fighting for social justice in a corrupt world. Our world has some great female leaders. Let me name a few who stick out to me. We can't talk about female leadership without mentioning Hillary Clinton. There is a chance she will be our next president. Then there is Melinda Gates who is helping the less fortunate gain access to appropriate health care. And we can't forget Malala Yousafzai. I learned about her when my wife was reading her book *I am Malala*. Malala stood up for women's rights. She was so outspoken that she was shot at point blank range in an attempt to stop her.

Not all female leaders are in the social sectors. This morning we come to our next Trending Now topic: Women in Ministry. Have you ever wondered if CPC is a place where women can use the gifts God has given them to serve His Kingdom to the best of their abilities? Is the local church a place where women can have a significant and meaningful impact? Some of us would say, "Of course. Why not? What's the big deal?" But others might not be so quick to answer.

For centuries women in the local church have felt resigned to only being able to serve in the kitchen and the children's ministry. You yourself might have grown up in a church where those were the only places where women were allowed to serve. As we enter this conversation today, let me say that this is really an in-house issue. If we were talking about this in the marketplace, it would be ridiculous to even start the conversation.

Two Guiding Principles

But we're not talking about the marketplace, we're talking about the church, and the church is lead differently. As Christians, we must take the Bible as the final word and not let our preconceived notions determine what we believe. As Christians we need to build our convictions upon the Bible and not our own personal experiences or what the world has to say.

The more I've studied this issue and served in the local church, the more my thinking has been challenged. Instead of folding your arms and tuning me out, will you listen attentively? Instead of only trying to hear points I may say that you agree with, will you have an open heart to God's word this morning? A grave mistake made in this conversation is the failure to examine all

of Scripture or look at the entirety of God's word and to focus only on a handful of passages someone may have taught you at some point.

It is important to recognize that even among genuine Christians there are a variety of opinions on the role of women in the church. Some Christians are more conservative and hold a different position on this topic, while others are more liberal. Both sides deeply love Christ but hold different views. If you examine three commentaries on some of the difficult passages, it's not unusual to read more than three different views on those Scriptures. Part of the reason for differing views is that these are some of the most difficult passages in all of Scripture.

Whatever view we hold, we must hold it with humility. We must remember that this matter is not in the same category as the deity of Christ or salvation by faith. This is a topic where Christians can agree to disagree and still have fellowship with each other. My goal is to give you a "broad brush" view of the Bible's teaching on the ministry of women in the church. We will not deal with husband/wife relationships or women in the marketplace. We don't have the time to examine every verse in deep detail, but we can approach God's word with an open mind and see what it has to say for our lives today.

Women in the Old Testament

Let's begin by looking at what the Old Testament says. In the book of Genesis there are two complementary accounts of the creation of man and woman. In Genesis 1 we read how God created humanity in two distinct gender.

**So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them (v. 27).**

The emphasis there is on the equality of man and woman, and their both being made in the image of God. Together they are blessed by God and commanded to subdue the earth together. 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 here is on the distinctive roles that men and women are to play. They are equal in value and dignity, but they are 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).

We all know that to be true because God provided a “helper suitable for man.” The word “helper” in the original language is *ezer* and it does not mean servant. Rather, it is a term of great honor. In the Old Testament, God is often described as the “helper” of His people using this same word. This word is used numerous times to describe how God helps His children in times of trouble. Genesis 2 goes on to say that God created the woman out of the man. The man was the source from whom woman was created. In the New Testament, this is interpreted as pointing to the role of headship, meaning headship belongs to the man.

In Genesis, we see that men and women are equal in worth and dignity but have different roles. They were not designed to **compete** with one another, but to **complete** one another. This truth is reflected throughout the Old Testament. The Old Testament teaches that women are to be treated as persons of worth. This contradicted the norms of the surrounding cultures where women were treated as property. But God made His covenant with women and men alike.

Women were encouraged in the reading of God’s word. Women ministered at the door of the Tabernacle. They offered their own sacrifices. God spoke directly to women. One of my favorite Old Testament stories focuses on the life of Deborah and her leadership during a difficult time in Israel’s history. It was Deborah who led God’s chosen people during a period of time in Judges. Deborah had a calling from God, and eventually she led God’s people to victory when a military commander wouldn’t go to battle without her accompanying him.

Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go” (Judges 4:8).

Deborah is a great example of a woman who was free to minister according to her gifts and calling. Nevertheless, we still see a pattern of male leadership in the Old Testament.

Jesus and Women

The relationship between men and women in the Jewish religion changed between the time when the Old Testament was completed and when Jesus came on the scene. Rabbis had a prayer they would pray every Sabbath: “God, I thank you that you’ve not made me a Gentile. God, I thank you that you’ve not made me a slave. God, I thank you that you’ve not made me a woman.” The rabbis held that it was better to burn God’s law than to allow a woman to read it and learn from it.

This is not how Jesus treated women; the way He treated women was revolutionary. In His encounter with the Samaritan woman, both she and His disciples were shocked that He would even speak to a woman.

The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” [For Jews do not associate with Samaritans] (John 4:9).

Yet Jesus often departed from the norm of His culture. Not only did Jesus speak to women, He taught them important spiritual truths. Jesus challenged the stereotype that said a woman belonged in the kitchen or the bedroom, but not in the classroom.

He called attention to the great faith of several women. He addressed one woman as a “daughter of Abraham” which was a title of great honor.

“Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” (Luke 13:16).

Jesus would use illustrations of both men and women in His teachings. Jesus had an entourage of women who followed Him and supported Him from their own financial means. It was primarily women who were present at His crucifixion and burial. And it was a woman—Mary—whom Jesus made the first witness to the resurrection. In this time period women weren’t considered reliable witnesses in court, but Jesus instructed Mary to go and tell His disciples that He was alive.

Even with all of this, Jesus did not choose any woman to be one of his twelve apostles. Some people say that was because the culture of His day would not have stood for that, but Jesus never pandered to people’s cultural sensitivities. We prefer to see this as an indication that there is a pattern of Biblical male headship within which women are free to serve and minister as equals. Jesus showed us, with His actions, that women are free to minister according to their gifts and calling.

Women in New Testament Churches

We see the same pattern in the New Testament. When you look to the New Testament you will see that women played a huge part in the spread of the gospel. The first convert to Christianity in Europe was a businesswoman named Lydia.

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message (Acts 16:14).

She was 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 are mentioned many times in the New Testament, and in most instances Priscilla’s name comes first. This is a most unusual order of names. It is likely that Priscilla was a more prominent teacher than her husband.

During our study through Romans, we saw Paul greeting several people in the church at Rome. Many of these were women who were co-laborers in spreading the gospel. He mentions Phoebe and calls her a “servant.”

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has

been the benefactor of many people, including me (Romans 16:1-2).

The word servant could be translated “deacon” or “minister.” It may refer to a formal position of leadership which Phoebe held in the local church. Paul calls her someone who helps many people. Whatever this woman was doing, it was more than serving brownies and coffee! In the New Testament women were free to minister in the church according to their gifts and calling.

It is clear that women served in a variety of leadership roles in the early church. This is consistent with the Bible’s teaching on spiritual gifts. The New Testament refers to the spiritual gifts of believers, gifts like teaching, prophecy, evangelism, encouragement, helps, mercy, giving, administration, leadership, and many others. These verses never hint at these gifts being reserved for a specific gender. Think with me; women possess all those gifts! And they are commanded to use them. A woman with the gift of pastor-teacher is commanded to shepherd and to teach the Scripture. Nowhere is she told to do so only with other women or only children.

It reminds me of a woman in our church who was reading the paper one morning and saw that a local group who focused on helping teens get off the street and back into school was in need of help. She approached me the next Sunday and asked what I could do. I turned the question around and asked, “What is God asking you to do?” Over the last couple of years she has become heavily involved in this ministry. She has cooked Thanksgiving dinner, gathered Christmas presents, collected clothes, and done more than I can know for these hurting teens. She has invested countless hours into showing the love of Christ and using the gifts and talents God gave her to further His Kingdom.

There are no examples in the New Testament of a woman serving in the official capacity of an Elder. The requirements for an Elder are listed out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In both of these passages it is clearly assumed that Elders are to be male. This leads us to two of the most controversial and debated passages on this subject. While we cannot look at these in great detail, let’s look at some broad strokes and talk about how our church views these passages. The first passage is in 1 Corinthians 11.

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....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 (verses 3, 11-12).

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. Woman was created from man, not vice versa. So this passage affirms headship. Let me say something about this. Men have misused this verse. When it comes to headship, men are to take their cue from Christ. Christ came

to serve and not to be served. Christ laid His life down for the church. Christ was the one who washed His disciple’s feet and became a servant. To have headship means to be caring and not crushing. It means to be self-sacrificing and not selfish. It means to love and not oppress. When men act in this manner they affirm the gifts and calling God has given to women as they minister in the church.

Also notice from 1 Corinthians 11 that, while affirming headship, this passage also affirms the ministry and the equality of women. In verses 5 and 13 Paul speaks of women prophesying and praying out loud in church.

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved....Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

These are very important functions! Prophesying was similar to speaking forth the Word of God. How important it is for leaders to guide the church in prayer. This passage also affirms how men and women are truly interdependent. Paul is making a statement of equality here.

Now let’s look at the second controversial passage.

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).

There are two things I want you to notice. First, a woman is given the right and privilege of learning or receiving instruction. That is not an issue to us, but in the first century that was unusual. So in a sense this passage affirms the fundamental right of women to be educated and to participate in worship.

Second, notice that women are also prohibited from doing certain things. They are told to be quiet and submissive. What does that mean? This passage is somewhat similar to the one in 1 Corinthians 14, where women are told to remain silent in the church. Now here is where we have to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. We know that Paul is not saying that women can never speak in church, because we just saw in 1 Corinthians 11 that women were free to pray and prophesy. Most scholars agree that 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 that 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 that Paul tells the Corinthians that a woman is not allowed to “teach or have authority in the church.” These words, which are to be taken together, describe the role

of an Elder. This is not saying that a woman can never teach. We know from other Scriptures that women did teach in both the home and the church. It means that a woman cannot teach in an authoritative capacity that violates the principle of headship. These women were acting in a way that violated that principle.

How does this apply to life and ministry at Central Peninsula Church? We have learned today that women are free to minister in the church according to their gifts and calling. This includes teaching other men as Priscilla did and as did the women who prophesied in Corinth. It also includes leading in ministries, as Phoebe did. Yet we have also learned that in Scripture there is a clear pattern of male headship. This headship is not 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 is clear that men alone are to serve in the capacity of primary authority in the church, and women who lead and teach ought to serve in a way that demonstrates respect for that headship.

As we speak about how this applies to the practice of the church, we have to keep in mind that churches are governed differently, so how this plays out in practice may vary from church to church. Perception plays a role here. What is perceived as a violation of the principle of headship in one church is not so regarded 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 that God has given the role of governing authority in the church to the Elders. These men are called to submit to the Scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit as they give direction to the entire church. They are called to shepherd the entire flock, and this includes guiding, feeding, caring and protecting. This is the job of qualified men only. There are many fine churches where women serve as Elders, but that is not how we understand the Scripture. However, let me add something here. Elders should also recognize the unique perspective and insights of women and they should seek them out while fulfilling their role.

This leads to the question of women on our pastoral staff. We have a large pastoral staff, some of whom (but not all) are Elders, and not all of whom preach. We believe it is entirely appropriate for us to have women on our pastoral staff because they will be ministering under the direction of the Elders. They are free to teach and lead both men and women in their ministries as an expression of their spiritual gifts and their God-given calling.

We will continue to have women serving as pastors in a variety of ministries at CPC. When we don't have women leading in these roles the church suffers. Let me tell you a story. A couple of years ago we had a guest speaker come to our Foster City campus. At the end of the morning he asked one of our staff members if we allow women to serve. I was shocked. He pointed out that we had no women leading us in worship, no women on stage, we didn't even had a female usher that morning! It reminds me of a quote from Pamela Heim: "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?" We definitely failed to do it that morning.

Think back to the three guiding principles I shared at the beginning. First, make sure that you take the Bible as the final word in this matter. Second, continue to recognize that there are a variety of opinions and many great people who think differently about this subject. Finally, as you think more about this sermon, make sure to allow Scripture to guide your beliefs. It can be easy to allow a book or a friend to direct you, but allow Scripture to direct you.

We should make it easy for women to serve. For some of you it may feel awkward because of your upbringing. Women, please support other women and encourage each other to serve by using the gifts God has given you. Men, will you do your best to encourage our sisters in Christ to minister according to their gifts and calling? Husbands, will you focus more on serving your wife and helping her to develop her God-given gifts and talents? One of the best ways a man can exercise Biblical headship is to invest in his wife and help her draw closer to Christ through serving. When we look at Christ, He always emphasized serving. Christ is the best example of serving and empowering women to be fully alive in their walk with God.

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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