

Gender Distinctions and Roles at Grace Church

God created two sexes, male and female, to bear his image in the world together. Men and women are not interchangeable, but have been created by God in his image with distinct, complementary, engendered bodies.¹ The purpose of this complementarity is to accomplish in partnership together the commission by God to subdue the Earth and by Christ to make disciples of all nations. Gender is created by God for his glory and as a part of his created order before the fall of mankind into sin. Both men and women, being made in the image of God, share total equality in essence, dignity, and value before God. God's revelation through his authoritative Word and witness in creation provides the church with the necessary framework for seeing the redeemed people of God as a spiritual family marked not primarily by hierarchy and authority but mutual love, honor, and welcome.

In this spiritual family, both men and women are necessary for spiritual flourishing and for the church to be faithful to her mission. Since this necessary partnership is intended by God, the church suffers if both sexes are not engaged in the work of the great commission and both empowered to use their gifts for the building up of the body. The design of equal partnership in the church does not necessitate interchangeable roles or offices. The Word of God teaches that the church family is to have both spiritual fathers and mothers, and that the office of pastor/elder is the primary way by which Fatherly representative headship is to be exercised in the church. The office of pastor/elder, being one of representative headship, is reserved for qualified men and is defined primarily by the oversight of the church and the public preaching of the Word of God. This distinction is not rooted in cultural necessity or historical setting but the intention and ordering of God. The role of spiritual mother is not specified Scripturally through a church office, but is to be assumed naturally by mature women through teaching and discipleship as modeled in Titus 2:3-5.

The act of preaching in gathered worship is a distinct pastoral action, as preachers authoritatively speak the word on behalf of Christ, and is reserved for tested and qualified² men under the direction of the pastor/elders. Apart from the role of pastor/elder and its unique functions of oversight and teaching/preaching, we believe Scripture assumes both men and women will be involved in all areas of church ministry and life, including the office of deacon and the ministry of teaching and discipleship. As a church family, we commit to regularly examining the work of our ministry to make sure both sexes are partnering together for the mission of God in tangible, clear, and healthy ways.

(Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; 3:14-19; Matthew 28:16-20; Romans 16:1-16; Ephesians 5:25-33; 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; 14:26-40; 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 3:1-13; 1 Peter 3:1-7)

¹ We also affirm that gender and sex can not be naturally or normally separated, but are meant to act in unity under the right design of God.

² Men who have been trained, vetted and meet the specific qualifications required of the pastorate, and whose teaching has been tested and directed by the pastor/elder team. In this scenario, in the preaching of the Word a qualified man is acting pastorally as a father of the church, even if he does not hold the official office of pastor/elder.

INTRO

The desire of this position paper is to outline a theological and biblical vision of how both men and women can flourish together in the church. In order to support this vision, this paper will define theological assumptions and methods, examine in detail related Biblical passages, and provide summarizing conclusions and recommendations.

THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Before undertaking a project to definitively outline the teaching of our church in regards to the roles of men and women in ministry and the life of the church, certain theological assumptions should be taken into consideration. These assumptions allow us to operate with a healthy baseline with which to consider arguments, and constitute the assumed or clarified position of the teaching of our church.

God As Trinity

We believe in one Triune God, eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—co-eternal in being, co-eternal in nature, co-equal in power and glory, having the same attributes and perfections (Deuteronomy 6:4; 2 Corinthians 13:14)

- From our Statement of Faith

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made; of the same essence as the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and was made human. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried. The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. He spoke through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to life in the world to come. Amen.

- The Nicene Creed

The goal of theology is worship of the triune God. It is majorly impactful to view the Scriptures and the doctrine we teach from them as Words from a self-existent creator. When viewed as words from a triune God, it means we view revelation through the lens of the gospel—the good

news of being welcomed into intimacy with the Father eternally loving the Son in the Spirit—and all our theology is done then in view of this understanding of God. If we are to learn anything about the nature of humanity as man and woman in the image of God, we must do so with the goal of worshiping, honoring, and glorifying our triune, uncreated God. In this sense, our theological method is what John Webster calls “holy reason”— a reason that is fully submitted to the holiness of God. We must never assume a truth that does not point us towards the glory of the trinity.

The Inspiration and Authority of God’s Word

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the verbally inspired Word of God, the final authority for faith and life, inerrant in the original writings, infallible, and God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12-13).

- From our Statement of Faith

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God’s revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

- From the Baptist Faith and Message, 2000

A theological groundwork for how we understand the Scriptures will help us to center our interpretive lens in order to understand texts assuming the authority of God in his Word before and above approaches based strictly on historical-critical readings,³ trajectory or “redemptive movement hermeneutics”⁴, or any hermeneutics that downplay or deny the authority of God’s word.

³ Historical-Critical methods look to the world “behind the text” in order to help arrive at applicable, real-world meaning. This method of interpretation is a helpful and necessary means of understanding the original audience and context of the Biblical witness. A historical-critical method helps the Bible reader to differentiate between what is specific to a cultural or historical context (and therefore may not be applicable to Christians in different contexts) and what is a principle of absolute truth. The negatives of relying too heavily on a historical critical hermeneutic is that it has difficulty addressing how the Bible really is Scripture, God’s living and transformative Word handed down to us, and not only unlocked after a rigorous and academic study of historical and cultural concepts.

⁴ A hermeneutical approach that follows the “trajectory” of specific topics throughout Scripture to see how God works to “redeem” that topic towards something more modern. A good example is William Webb, *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals*.

Male and Female Designed Complementary in the Image of God

We believe that God created human beings in his image in two embodied sexual kinds—male and female (Genesis 1:26-27)... but through Adam's sin the race fell, inherited a sinful nature, and became alienated from God; man is totally depraved and of himself utterly unable to remedy his lost condition (Genesis 1:26, 27; Romans 3:22, 23; 5:12; Ephesians 2:1–3, 12).

- From our Statement of Faith

Both men and women are together created in the divine image and are therefore equal before God as persons, possessing the same moral dignity and value, and have equal access to God through faith in Christ. Men and women are together the recipients of spiritual gifts designed to empower them for ministry in the local church and beyond. Therefore, men and women are to be encouraged, equipped, and empowered to utilize their gifting in ministry, in service to the body of Christ, and through teaching in ways that are consistent with the Word of God.

- From the Acts29 Theological Distinctives

God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life.

Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord.

- From the Gospel Coalition Confessional Statement

As part of this project, we will not debate the equality of men and women in dignity, value, worth, or humanity as both made in the image of God. We will affirm that men and women are not interchangeable, but are created in two sexual kinds to complement each other in a beautiful design from the Triune God. We will explore the meaning of complementarity and its scope in the church, and likewise recognize the uniqueness of fallen humanity and the effect of sin on the imago dei.

The Unique Role of The Church

We believe that the church, which is the body and espoused bride of Christ, is a spiritual organism made up of all born-again persons, and that all Christians are commanded by Scripture to take part in the regular teaching, fellowship, and accountability of a congregation of fellow disciples led by biblically qualified pastors organized as a Gospel Church (Hebrews 10:25; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 5:25–27; 1 Corinthians 12:12–14; 2 Corinthians 11:2). We believe that the establishment and continuance of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:27; 18:22; 20:17; 1 Timothy 3:1–3; Titus 1:5–11). We believe in the autonomy of the local churches, free of any external authority and control (Acts 13:1–4; 15:19–31; 20:28; Romans 16:1,4; 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16; 1 Corinthians 5:4–7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1–4).

- From our Statement of Faith

The church has a clear biblical mandate to look beyond its own community to the neighborhood, the nation, and the world as a whole; thus, mission is not an optional program in the church but an essential element in the identity of the church. We also believe we are responsible neither to retreat from our culture nor to conform to it, but with humility, through the Spirit and the truth of the gospel, to engage it boldly as we seek its transformation and submission to the lordship of Christ.

- From the Acts29 Theological Distinctives

While the question of how men and women may complement each other in the home, the workplace, and the culture is an important one, we will focus on the role of men and women together in the church. The church is God's primary missionary strategy, but also is a distinct theological entity with a unique framework meant to display the grace of God in building a unified, diverse family. God's providence in how he structures and upholds his church as his people is unique and should be differentiated from appeals to cultural norms or practical wisdom in structuring familial traditions, assumptions, or roles.

Commentary

Genesis 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Both man and woman are made in the image of God. The “us” of verse 26 is plural in form, signifying this creation is an act of the Triune God. The image of God is not “image of male” or “image of female”. There is not then a misunderstanding or disagreement between the members of the Trinity in creation, but total harmony. This will help interpret other Scriptures which speak to Christ’s treatment of gender or the implications on gender to those who are full of the Spirit in the age of the church. When God speaks of creating “man”, he speaks of creating “mankind”, not males. This further supports our understanding that both men and women are made in the image of God.

The image of God means a representation of God—meant to be his “viceroys” or “ambassadors” in the world. More than any other feature, to be made in God’s image means that humans uniquely represent God in his creation world.

To be made in the “likeness” of God is to be made similarly to God. Likeness does not imply sameness, or equality of essence, but rather resemblance. In Hebrews 1, Jesus is said to be an “exact imprint” of God—a comparison between mere humans and the one who is God-man. To be made to resemble God is not that we share in his divine nature in our natural state, but that we exhibit qualities and rightfully assume duties that represent God, specifically the quality of authority over creation. Notice it is to “them” (plural) that dominion is given, meaning both man and woman without discrimination.

The charge of dominion of the earth, often called the “cultural mandate” is given both to Adam and Eve—not simply to Adam, implying that both are necessary and both bear responsibility and weight for this mission. The mandate can be summed up through the several charges: be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, subdue the earth, and have dominion over every living thing. “Filling the earth” has several natural readings, including the implication to pro-creation, once again only possible through the equal partnership of both men and women. Fruitfulness in Scripture also has the connotation of spiritual flourishing, and multiplication in the earth is clarified for those in Christ in the Great Commission of Jesus (Mat 28) to make/multiply disciples. The implication is that fruitfulness, certainly in the new covenant, is not limited to those who are physically able to bear children. There is no implication, however, that the necessity of both genders has somehow changed under the new covenant.

The “subduing” of the earth has to do with rightful control—exercise in everything from proper cultivation of the land (another heavy Biblical image) to creative control of the faculties of the mind and body through arts and sciences. The idea that both men and women are equally given the command to subdue the earth should remind us of the necessity of proper education and opportunities for creative cultivation for both men and women.

To “have dominion” over the world is a natural outflow of the need for subjugation. The idea is that both men and women are the “crown jewel” of God’s creation (Psalm 8), and therefore the rest of creation is subject to them. Although different physiologically, both men and women possess the necessary God-given ability to rule over creation together.

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

*“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”*

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Again we are met with the necessity of both men and women, not just for the commission of God, but for relational completion. A world full of men would not only be a world absent of physical and spiritual multiplication, but without relational goodness. The word “helper” (*ezer*) reinforces this idea. The woman is not an optional add-on to man’s task, but a necessary ally. Rather than seeing this idea as speaking to the function of the woman (she only exists to “help” the man’s mission), it should be seen as a picture of completion—without a partner fit for him, God’s chief creation of humankind can never fulfill their God-given operation. It is also worth noting that the divine Holy Spirit is likewise called our “helper” (John 14:26), not because of the Spirit’s subordinative role in mankind’s self-sufficient mission, but because of the Spirit’s necessary role in the new humanity (Rom 8:9).

The idea of “fittingness” has this connotation elsewhere in Scripture when used in relation to Jesus Christ (Heb 2:10). Only by being God and Man could Christ act as the fitting redeemer. The beauty of fittingness is that nothing else will do—in the case of Adam and Eve, no one else than a complementary *human*—not bird or beast of the field.

The creation of the woman from man does not imply superiority of the male type, but rather the codependency of both male and female. Just as Eve was drawn from Adam, so all men are drawn from women and are the fruit of the womb of Eve, our first mother. The order of creation does

have significance to Paul (1 Tim 2:13-14) in his argument for order in the church, but he likewise emphasizes the “saving” nature of Eve’s childbearing, showing that both Adam (from whom Eve was taken) and Eve (from whom all mankind is taken) are both necessary for the work of redemption. When referencing the headship of Adam in Romans 5, Paul does not mention the sin of Eve but rather the sin of Adam. Neither does he mention Adam as the “source” of Eve, but instead the representative figurehead of Adam as the one who plunged mankind into condemnation.

Mankind’s first recorded words are a love song of complementarity, since fittingness is an expression of true beauty. Because there is no one else who may complete the creation of mankind except for woman, she is the “at last” crown jewel of creation, that which completes the perfection of God’s design. It is no wonder that the author of Genesis then reminds the reader of the sacred unity of marriage. For such an intimate covenant, only “bone of my bone” will do. In such a state of perfect complementarity and union, Adam and Eve are unashamed of their anatomical differences and unhaunted by their nakedness before God and one another. It is their distinct bodies, after all, which only serve to display their interdependence amongst their diversity.

Genesis 3:14-19

The Lord God said to the serpent,

*“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.
I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”*

To the woman he said,

*“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”*

And to Adam he said,

*“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,*

*'You shall not eat of it,'
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.'*

The curse of the fall is categorized by species before it is categorized by gender. That Satan is forced to grovel lower than the animals, named and ruled by mankind and unsuitable for human complementarity, is no coincidence. To disobey God is to invite calamity and suffering, but to lead others into disobedience is to invite the harshest kind of punishment (Matt 18:6). The enmity of the woman and the serpent is about more than a natural fear of reptilians, but refers to the redemption through the unique role of women.

The “offspring” of Satan are those who make a practice of sinning and not of love (1 John 3:9-11), those who do not possess the righteousness of God by faith and are not “born of God”. The offspring of Eve are those “born of woman”, which encapsulates all of mankind, but also uniquely he who was the “firstborn of creation” (Col 1:15) and yet still “born of woman” (Gal 4:4), Jesus Christ. Satan is the enemy of all mankind, but since Jesus Christ the Son of God “became like his brothers in every respect”, he is able to “destroy... the devil” (Heb 2:13-18).

Although the pain of childbearing is increased for the woman, it is through her “birth pangs” that the destruction of her great enemy comes. Multiplication, being the original commission of Eden and the new commission of Christ, is the antidote to the problem of sin. In the same way, it is through “birth pangs” that the world is delivered (Rom 11:22). This helps us to understand the significance of the fall: it is not only physical childbirth that is complicated, but the entirety of redemption and deliverance from Sin. The man too has “pain” in laboring to subdue the earth and taste its fruit. The gospel teaches us that Christ offers the deliverance of new birth (John 3) and the deliverance of a new creation (Rev 21:5). When men and women work together in Christ to showcase the fruit of the gospel, they do so in a way that produces both multiplication and dominion—a complete reversal of the effects of the fall.

Much ink has been spilled on the nature of the husband's “rule” of his wife. It is important to note that the other mention of “rule” in Genesis is in speaking of both man and woman's joint commission to “rule” creation. For Adam to “rule” his wife is in some way a perversion of the created order of unity and joint-rule, since she is not simply another part of creation but instead “bone of [his] bone”. Although it is not entirely clear, the emphasis on the text seems to be in the disunity “contrary will” of the husband and wife. The result of sin is that there is a natural enemy to the one-flesh union of husband and wife—that of competing interests and a new desire for one party to dominate the other. We should not therefore be surprised that there would be a “battle

of the sexes” that naturally occurs in sinful society. Nor should we be surprised in the sinful subjugation or ruling over of women by men. The fact that both sexism and chauvinism exist are results of the fall.

The pain given to the vocation of the man is related to the second part of the great commission of creation. While the command to “fill” the earth is pained through thorny childbirth, the command to “subdue” the earth is pained through thorns and thistles of the ground. Whether a household is involved in gardening or farming is beside the point: the creation vocation to conform the earth to the will of God is made difficult by sin. While the curse is given to the man, he alone does not bear the weight of the subjugation of the earth. Just as both men and women are needed to fill the earth and multiply (both biologically and socially), so both are needed to subdue the earth. It is worth noticing though that while the woman has a unique role in multiplication (that is, childbirth) due to her biological differences, so it is hinted that the man has a unique role to play in subduing the earth on a physical level (the working of the ground) due to his more natural ability for physical labor and feats of strength. It is also worth noting, however, that this link is far less clear, since women are often more than capable of “man’s work” from a physical standpoint, while a man can never bear a child.

Romans 16:1-16

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

The sheer magnitude of names in Paul’s close to Romans should be impressive enough—showing his ministry was by no means individualistic—but it’s also worth noting the gender diversity present and naturally assumed by the apostle. Phoebe is mentioned specifically as a *deacon* (servant), and a patron of Paul herself. In this list of benefactors, she is not only to be greeted, but her ministry is commended above all. Prisca and Aquila are mentioned together,

not here in reference to their marriage, but in their courageous example and hospitality in welcoming others into their home. They are likewise known for their discipleship and teaching—where in Acts 18 they are described “explaining the way of God” together in partnership.

Throughout this relational benediction, both men and women are assumed to be both beloved members of the family and household of God and genuine works in the kingdom of God. There lies no distinction in the way men and women are spoken of: brothers, mothers, sisters, fathers, all are valuable. Neither is it just men who are held in high esteem: Junia is mentioned as “well known” alongside Andronicus, outdating Paul in her conversion.

The point in Romans 16 is simple: the church of Jesus Christ should be a household where both men and women play vital parts, the kind of place where both men and women flourish together in their ministry and are beloved, effective, fellow workers. Not only are men and women flourishing together, but likewise Greeks and Romans—those of different cultures—with different names and heritages, living in unity and charity that flows from the grace of God in the gospel expounded in the epistle to the Romans.

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For 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 was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

The context of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is tricky to pinpoint, but what is clear is that there is some dispute over the practice of women abandoning their traditional head coverings in worship. This “tradition”, as Paul calls it in verse 1, was cultural in nature, but not unimportant. In Graeco-Roman culture, an unveiled woman in public was a sexual symbol, either of liberation or availability. Paul’s main concern is for the right ordering of worship in the church. Although the vessel of disorder is cultural (coverings and uncoverings), the result is that of confusion and

disunity in the body. Besides this, the apostle also points to the fact that such decorum, although specific to the culture of the time, is pointing to a theological principle rooted in creation, and is not to be thrown away lightly.

There are some confusing elements lost in translation here as well. In the ESV, “woman” is typically translated as “wife” throughout this text. In reality, it is the same word for both, but it is somewhat unclear as to Paul’s audience. Clearly, he has the whole congregation in mind, married and unmarried, since it would be strange to allow unmarried women to uncover their heads in worship while restricting married women (and nowhere is such a stipulation implied). At the same time, it seems likely that the problem in the church primarily lay within husband and wife relationships, which would be natural given that most women at the time would be married, even from an early age. So then, the order of creation and the implications of headship should influence how we worship, in order not to bring shame or disgrace on the church and the name of Christ. Regardless, the point in verse 2 is that everyone has a “head”, even Christ, the Messiah, who in his earthly ministry and incarnation was under the headship of the Father and lived to do his will.

Headship, according to Paul, is not simply a matter of physiology or cultural/social construction. Rather, he refers back to creation and God’s intended design. What exactly “headship” is in unclear, but what is clear is that it refers primarily to what is “proper” and “right” in creation. We have already seen in Genesis that what is “right” in creation—the ordering of men and women that is rightly ordered and devoid of shame—is that men and women both work equally and interdependently to fill and subdue the earth. So it is not appropriate to see “headship” as a kind of superiority or authority which undermines this interdependence. Ultimately these implications of headship in the church in corporate worship shake out like this in verse 11: “in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman”. Interdependence and partnership, for both men and women, is rooted in creation and redemption.

Likewise, though texts like Ephesians 1 and Colossians 1, we know that Christ is the “head” of the church, and ultimately all things will come under his headship, “whether in heaven or on earth”. Paul’s shift in saying that Christ is the head of “man” has more to do with his addressing the problem at hand in Corinth than an implication that all men are uniquely under the authority of Christ, instead of all Christians. The point is that no one is independent.

What does “head” mean? Some have argued that here “head” simply means “source”, and link back to Eve coming from Adam’s rib, and give some interesting arguments from how the word is used metaphorically in ancient texts. But even if that fits here as a definition and not just an extended metaphor, I can’t infer what “submission” means, like it is used in Ephesians 4, when Paul calls wives to “submit to their husbands” because they are “head of their wife”. How do you submit to a source? In all of these cross-biblical contexts, “submission” and “head” imply some kind of authority.

Perhaps the most fitting understanding is authority, but focused on representation. Typically authority bears connotations of “responsibility”, “power” or “control”. In other words,

“authority” implies more ability, therefore more responsibility. But there is no evidence in this text that submission is firstly related to obedience, control, power, or subjugation. The emphasis in this text, as in others like Ephesians 5, is on *right order* and *unity*, not on power or authority.

Authority does not always mean responsibility. It can also mean, as often does in relation to Christ and the church, representation. For instance, the authority we see scripturally of a pastor over a congregation. Your pastors do not have more authority or power in God’s kingdom—rather, we are fellow workers, it’s the people of God who carry out the ministry. Your pastors do not have more say-so over your spiritual state, more ability to bring you to Christ than anyone else. Rather, scripture says the authority comes not primarily from responsibility but representation. Your pastors must give an account for those in their care. They represent the congregation before God. Submission to pastors is not about bowing under their rule, but allowing them to represent you and opening your heart up to their care and teaching.

Adam is created by God first in the garden and given responsibility to subdue the earth *with* Eve. Again, not a greater responsibility. Not more power, not more say. But he is given it first, and he is the one who names Eve, and ultimately the one when God calls, who bears the representation for his marriage and family, and ultimately the whole family race (Romans 5). Eve is called Adam’s helper, not because her responsibility is lesser and therefore she must obey his whims, but because in their partnership they have specific, not greater or lesser, roles: Adam is the representative head, Eve the helper. But both share the authority from God to subdue the earth. Both Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they both had responsibility before God. But who bore the representation of that disobedience? Adam did. To Eve he gives a consequence, but to Adam he says “Because you have... eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.” The weight of the curse of death for disobedience comes upon his head. God tells him “from dust you were made, to dust you shall return”.

To put all of this in context: 1 Corinthians 11 is a test case. It calls both men and women in the church, in light of our mutual dependence, to act appropriately and orderly. It does not argue that women should be subjected to men, but rather that men and women both should be careful not to let their public worship and the way they carry themselves publicly undermine God’s design. This has specific application in marriage, wherein the husband serves a unique role as the representative “head” and the wife as the “helper”. If, in our modern worship, we bring in or abandon any cultural practices that seem to undermine God’s design for marriage, we are in the same boat as the Corinthians: “inclined to be contentious”.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged,

and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But all things should be done decently and in order.

Coming on the heels of Paul's exhortation on orderly worship and head coverings in chapter 11, this passage is easier to understand. When Paul says that women should "keep silent" in the churches, he clearly has something specific in mind—since right before this he has encouraged "any" and "all" to exercise their spiritual gifts, and likewise in chapter 11 noted that women were already "praying and prophesying".

It is because this scriptural view of worship is so communal and inclusive, encouraging all people to utilize their gifts, that Paul must give specific instructions on how such verbal manifestations of the Spirit are to be done orderly. Notice the commands of silence to those who use tongues when there is no interpreter (v. 28), those prophesying at the same time (vv. 30-31), and finally, disruptive women who should bring up their questions at home (vv. 34-35).

So what kind of specific exhortation does Paul have in mind for women, if not a general call to silence? It's possible that he has in view a kind of "evaluation" of prophecy: that is, the "weighing in on what is said". This evaluation of giftings may have been reserved for the apostles or church leaders, and so it would make sense for Paul, for the sake of order, to ask that any other opinions be sorted out at home. It's also possible that Paul is speaking specifically to women who are publicly questioning their *own husbands'* prophecies, which is why such an act would be called "shameful", echoing the kind of "shame" a woman brings on herself and her household when she worshiped with her head uncovered, a shame that derives from an aberration in the natural order of creation. This makes sense with Paul's reference to "the Law", which most likely refers to the natural law of creation, since there is no specific reference in the Mosaic law which references women speaking in public.

Although it is difficult to determine the exact situation in Corinth that Paul is speaking to, we know there are cultural concerns at play, just like in the case of head coverings. In the Ancient World, it was *always* considered "shameful" for women to remain silent in public debate. So for a woman to speak up in a worship gathering was, first of all, a cultural anomaly. The fact that Paul assumes women will "pray and prophesy" (with the right position/covering) is an aberration and a shocking liberty. It makes sense, that the church would be tempted to take that newfound liberty too far and disrupt the order of worship. If such was the case, then the most

likely scenario in Corinth is that certain married women were speaking in a way that disrupted the order of worship and brought shame upon their family and the church, which was a result of both cultural sensitivity on the subject and an abandonment of their husband's representative headship.

In modern worship settings, there is no cultural shame associated with women speaking publicly. In fact, it may be just the opposite: a restriction of women or any other demographic may be seen as shameful. But the important theological principle to take away is the same: worship should not bring shame to God's created order and design in the home, be done in a peaceful way, and any kind of public speech that undermines that should not be allowed. The result of this is that the worship of the church is not like normal public spaces: not because of its restrictions, but because in the freedom of the gospel each member can participate together in worship as one unified family.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Immediately preceding this passage in 2:1-10, Paul is urging Timothy towards prayer for those in authority. Apparently in some way, humble prayer is a kind of "adorning" for men and women, a kind of "orderly" action. The point of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, like that of the passages in 1 Corinthians, is for Paul to instruct on the proper attitude and order of worship. The first thing to note is that it is just as radical in the ancient world for women to "learn" at all as it is for them to speak publicly. Most traditions forbade women from learning at all, and taught that they were naturally inferior to men intellectually. Therefore this text's exhortation for "women to learn quietly" is not a patriarchal take-down of women's freedom, but a liberating ethos of discipleship that begins with Jesus, who was surrounded by women who sat at his feet and learned from him (Luke 10:39). The focus of this passage then is not about *who* can learn, but *how*. Men should adorn themselves with a counter-cultural posture of gentleness and peace, women with a counter-cultural adornment of good works.

The "quietness" commended by Paul is not "silence", but a picture of "quietness", a stillness of soul—a teachable spirit. Why would Paul direct this towards women generally? Shouldn't we all learn in this way? One reason is because of the tendency of the younger women in Timothy's care to drift towards being "busybodies" (1 Tim 5:13). But it's also clear that both men and women are to learn to come to worship in this way, since all are encouraged to live a "peaceful

and quiet life” (1 Tim 2:2). Perhaps Paul is singling out women because they are new to the learning space, and therefore in need of further instruction.

In speaking of “learning with submissiveness”, obviously Paul does not have in mind submission to all people, or to all men, but rather to teachers, since not all were teaching when the church gathered. Rather, women are to exercise submission in the context of the created order: to their husbands (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18) and to their leaders in the church (Heb 13:17). Women are to learn, but the result of their learning is not that they would be “liberated” from the natural order of God in the home or the church, but that they would be included in it.

It’s not entirely clear if Paul is using two constructs here (teach and exercise authority) or one (teach with authority). Either way, the two concepts are related. The word “teach” has a specific connotation in the pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy. It is not a “general” teaching of any kind of content, but the official “passing on” of sound doctrine through the exposition of Scripture, a teaching that is highlighted by Paul for Timothy and those he appoints as elders to be able and willing to partake in. This passage does not in any way imply, therefore, a full-sale prohibition of women teaching, but rather a specific kind of teaching, that is, teaching that involves an exercising of authority, implies authority, or is a known kind of “authoritative teaching”.

Later in 1 Timothy, Paul will link again these concepts in defining the qualifications for an elder/overseer. The elder is the one who “oversees” the church and “cares” for it, and is “able to teach”. It’s this unique teaching role, the one that involves an exercise of oversight and authority, that he envisions doing the teaching that is to be “submitted” to. In other words, the call for women in this passage, as they enter into a new environment of learning, is not simply to avoid teaching—but to submit to the qualified elders who are called to teach them and exercise oversight over them.

Although not made explicit by Paul, it is the act of preaching that fits most squarely in this category of “authoritative teaching”. In the act of preaching, the preacher stands before the congregation, representing them to God, and delivers the Word of God. The preacher is both overseer and teacher in that moment—the one who has been given authority by God to “care” for the gathered flock, and the one who is called to teach and feed. This dual nature is clearly seen in Paul’s exhortation to Timothy, the young elder, in 2 Timothy 4:2, “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

The prohibition of the Scripture in this text is not a prohibition of women from teaching men generally, but from doing so in a way that would ask other men and women to submit to her as a wife does a husband or a church member an elder. It’s important to note that this prohibition would also include men teaching women authoritatively who do not also meet the qualifications of an elder or are unfit to represent the church and receive that kind of submission. This kind of scenario, in Paul’s mind, would go against the created order of the family, where men in their marriages are the representative heads, and where pastors in the church family are the representatives of their people. Nothing in this text implies a superiority of men: that they are better teachers, that they demand submission because of their gender. The focus of the text is

rather on the posture both men and women have in worship: a posture of quiet and submissive learning, of gentleness, peace, and order.

This is precisely why Paul refers again to the order of creation, with Adam coming first. It is also why he refers to the salvation of mankind coming through Eve and through childbirth. Although in every family the man is uniquely fit to serve as the representative head, the woman is uniquely blessed to be the vessel of life, a picture of the new life and new birth we have in Christ.

1 Timothy 3:1-13

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

What office does Paul have in mind when he says "overseer"? Using other NT texts, we believe the most faithful understanding is that he is speaking of one office which is tied together clearly in Acts 20, where Paul addresses the Ephesian "elders". The term "elder" in the NT context has less to do with age and is simply a borrowed term from the leadership of the Jewish Synagogue, a term of oversight and teaching. The men of Ephesus addressed by Paul in Acts 20 are the elders of the church, not the synagogue. In Acts 20:28 those who are elders are charged to "keep watch over the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers". The office of elder then is one of oversight—but a specific kind of oversight. This oversight is not about unchecked authority or rule, it's not about obedience and command. The oversight elders are given is a "pastoral" one: like those who watch over a flock. Jesus is called by Peter the "shepherd and overseer of our souls", and the "chief shepherd" who will come to judge the earthly shepherds, which are referred to by Peter as "elders" who "exercise oversight". The word for "shepherd" is "pastor" in Greek, or literally "one who feeds".

Because of all of these intertextual links, it seems very unlikely that the NT order Paul has in mind for the church has multiple different offices (pastor, elder, bishop, etc). Of course it is

possible, but we are left with a deficit in explanation as to the purpose and qualifications of these separate offices if they are taken not in tandem (as the text would suggest) but separately.

Most clearly, we believe the Scripture speaks of one office: the "elders" (always plural when referenced), with specific functional authority (oversight) and one attitude and means to do it (pastor/feed/teach).

The grammatically masculine language, without any hint of exception or inclusion whatsoever for a woman to fall within these qualifications, seems to be a strong indicator that as Paul wrote this and as Timothy read this, both understood that women were not suitable candidates for the office of overseer. This is even more clear in light of the qualifications for deacons, which include feminine language that is translated here as "wives" but is grammatically the same word as "women". The translation "women" is much preferable for three reasons: 1) There is no clear theological reason to exclude women from this office, either in the pastoral epistles themselves or the NT itself, as it does not directly involve either oversight (authority) or teaching, 2) The example of women in the NT who are called "servants", the same word for "deacons", and who, like Phoebe, appear to hold a formal office in the church; and 3) Because it seems arbitrary to require the wives of deacons to meet certain qualifications, but not the wives of elders.

There is no hint here that elders are more important or unequal in position to deacons, unless you read that yourself into their roles (i.e. believing "overseeing/teaching" is better than "serving"). Neither should one be seen as a "leadership" role while another is simply "subordinate". Yes, deacons are to submit to the teaching and oversight of their elders, but so are fellow elders to one another. The offices of the church, just like the roles of the family, do not necessarily imply hierarchy but rather mutuality and interdependence.

Conclusions

Based on our commentary and theological assumptions, we can make several conclusions.

1. Men and women are created equal in the image of God, and share the same mission and purpose from God to subdue and fill the earth—a mission that is reaffirmed by Christ in his great commission.
2. Both men and women are necessary for this mission, and it is both assumed and demonstrated in Scripture that the church only flourishes when both men and women are operating in ministry.
3. Nowhere does Scripture testify to a superiority of men or the command that all women are to submit to all men.
4. Although bearing the same image of God and the same mission from God, men and women are not interchangeable. In regards to the family, and the church, which is the family of God, the differences of men and women follow the order of creation. Adam was created first and bore the responsibility of sin in the world, and so the man's role in the family is uniquely, but not solely, that of representation. Eve was created second, and bore the responsibility of bringing forth children and life as a help to her family and to mankind, and so the woman's role in the family is uniquely, but not solely that of helper.
5. The church, being the family of God, is a place of order and interdependence. Both men and women are necessary for the church to complete her mission, and the primary relationship between men and women in the church is not one of authority, but of brotherly and sisterly love. Authority and submission in the church is likewise viewed through the lens not of domineering, but through fatherly and motherly care.
6. Because the New Testament affirms this created structure as that which gives order to the worship and structure of the church, it means that only qualified men are fit to assume the role of representation in the church (elder/overseer) and its unique teaching responsibilities (primarily that of authoritative teaching/preaching).

Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, we can make the following practical implications or recommendations.

Gathered Worship

The worship of the church is a work of the people of the church, and not a performance by those who speak or lead. Except for the unique pastoral act of preaching and its dual nature of teaching and exercising oversight/authority, every role in worship can be taken on by both men or women, including prayer, scripture reading, and administering the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). The church will continue to work to show representation by the members of the church and by both men and women in our corporate worship.

Only pastor/elders or qualified men may preach in gathered worship. A qualified man who is not a pastor of Grace Church must have the affirmation of the elders to his character and fittingness to represent the congregation, and a notice of his preaching must be given to the congregation in advance, except in emergency situations.

Groups

The purpose of groups at Grace Church is for discipleship and belonging. Both men and women are necessary for these endeavors, and so all mixed-gender groups will be required to have both a man and a woman in leadership. It will be up to the group which part these leaders play (i.e. facilitation, hosting, organization, etc) according to their gifting. To help maintain unity and the integrity/honor of the family, it will be our normal practice for married group leaders to lead with their spouse, and for single group leaders to lead with another single or a married couple. Same gender groups will be led by a man or woman of the same gender.

Other Teaching Environments

Mixed gender teaching environments will be overseen by elders or qualified men in membership of the church. This includes equipping hour classes, special classes, teaching at members meetings, etc. The leaders of Equipping Classes should prioritize and seek out gifted and trained women to assist them in teaching as needed. Gender-specific teaching environments are taught and led by a leader of the same gender.

Offices and Ministry

Only qualified men may serve in the office of pastor/elder. Both men and women who have been tested and meet the character qualifications of deacon may serve as deacons. Besides environments that are gender-specific (i.e. men's ministry, women's ministry), both men or women may serve in any needed area of ministry.

Women's Leadership Team

To assist the pastors with care of women in the church, and to help the pastors represent the diversity of the body of Christ at Grace, we recommend the formation of a women's leadership team. The women's leadership team is a group of 3 or more women in the church who meet the

Biblical qualifications of deacons and have been commissioned by the church as deacons to assist the elders in pastoral care and shepherding of female church members.

The team will gather at least once a quarter with the elders to discuss pastoral care situations, provide feedback, and determine action steps for the spiritual health of the congregation. The women's leadership team will also be called upon if needed to provide a wise and discerning sounding board for the elders who are called to oversee the church. As deacons of the church, the members of the women's leadership team will be lead servants and examples to the congregation of Godliness. Besides their official responsibilities in member care, they should see themselves in light of Titus 2 as true maternal figures in the congregation, ready to accept the mantle of discipleship, mentorship, leadership, and care worthy of a mother of the church.

Per the bylaws description of deacons, members of the women's leadership team will be nominated by the congregation, tested, and affirmed by the laying on of hands at a membership meeting. This team will also receive specialized training in spiritual care and teaching.

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