

# The Bible, the Church, and Gender Roles

Kathy Keller

## THE BIBLICAL TEXTS AND THE TEACHING REGARDING GENDER ROLES

### 1. Creation #1: Genesis 1:26-28

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

- Note: It takes multiple persons to reflect the tri-une image of God.

### 2. Creation #2: Genesis 2:18-25

<sup>18</sup>The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." <sup>19</sup>Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam<sup>[a]</sup> no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs<sup>[b]</sup> and closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib<sup>[c]</sup> he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup>The man said,  
"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called 'woman,'<sup>[d]</sup>  
for she was taken out of man."

<sup>24</sup>For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. <sup>25</sup>The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

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#### Footnotes:

Genesis 2:20 Or the man

Genesis 2:21 Or took part of the man's side

Genesis 2:22 Or part

Genesis 2:23 The Hebrew for woman sounds like the Hebrew for man.

- Note: In the first creation account we see the ontological equality of male and female, reflecting the Trinity; in the second account we see the voluntary subordination as to role (cf. Philippians 2). The subordination is not one of inferiority; rather *ezer* is a very strong word most often used of "God, our Help."

### 3. Fall: Genesis 3:12-17

<sup>12</sup>The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup>So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,  
"Cursed are you above all the livestock  
and all the wild animals!  
You will crawl on your belly  
and you will eat dust  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring<sup>[a]</sup> and hers;  
he will crush<sup>[b]</sup> your head,  
and you will strike his heel."

<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said,  
"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;  
with pain you will give birth to children.  
Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you."

<sup>17</sup>To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you;  
through painful toil you will eat of it  
all the days of your life.

- Note: Some commentators locate the subordination of women in the curse of the Fall (v.16). However, this ignores the Genesis 2 account of creation, the significance of naming, and the life of the Trinity, whose image requires both male and female to reflect. The Fall twists something which God meant to be good ("It is good" was pronounced over all his creation, including gender roles and distinctions) into something which is often harmful and abusive on the man's part and idolatrous on the woman's part.

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Footnotes:

Genesis 3:15 Or seed

Genesis 3:15 Or strike

#### 4. I Corinthians 11:3-16

<sup>3</sup>Now 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. <sup>4</sup>Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. <sup>5</sup>And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. <sup>6</sup>If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. <sup>7</sup>A man ought not to cover his head,<sup>[a]</sup> since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup>For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup>neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup>For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. <sup>11</sup>In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup>For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. <sup>13</sup>Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup>Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, <sup>15</sup>but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. <sup>16</sup>If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

- Note: Notice that men and women are doing the identical public ministry (v. 4 and 5). In keeping with the rest of Corinthians, Paul is trying to reign in the over-enthusiastic church, which has abandoned all gender role distinctions and is working off a unisex model. (Having seen the Holy Spirit fall with power on both men and women, this would not be an unrealistic extrapolation for the church.) However, appealing to Creation, Paul insists that gender roles, though redeemed and rescued from the prevailing patriarchal culture, still apply. He wants Christian women to show some token of their acceptance of the continuation of creation ordinance gender roles, in this case the headcovering. How/does this translate to today's culture? (Hint: physical gestures that carry messages can be translated into different cultures so that they still convey the same message.)

#### 5. I Corinthians 14:26, 29-38

<sup>26</sup>What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

<sup>29</sup>Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. <sup>30</sup>And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. <sup>31</sup>For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. <sup>32</sup>The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. <sup>33</sup>For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.

As in all the congregations of the saints, <sup>34</sup>women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. <sup>35</sup>If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. <sup>36</sup>Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? <sup>37</sup>If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. <sup>38</sup>If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

- Note: Paul has just discussed women prophesying and praying, and in v. 26 everyone in the church is meant to contribute to worship. What, then, does the call for women to “remain silent” mean? Whatever it means, it is based on gender alone, and we have to find some way of obeying it, rather than merely ignoring or discarding it.

## 6. 1 Timothy 2:11-3:15

<sup>11</sup>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women<sup>[a]</sup> will be saved<sup>[b]</sup> through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

### 1 Timothy 3 - Overseers and Deacons

<sup>1</sup>Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer,<sup>[c]</sup> he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. <sup>5</sup>(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup>He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

<sup>8</sup>Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

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#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 2:15 Greek she

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 2:15 Or restored

<sup>1</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1 Traditionally bishop; also in verse 2

<sup>11</sup>In the same way, the *gynea*<sup>[a]</sup> are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

<sup>12</sup>A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. <sup>13</sup>Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

<sup>14</sup>Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>15</sup>if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

- Note: This is a difficult passage for those wanting a full egalitarian ministry open to women. What does it mean "neither teach nor have authority" over men? Cannot fall back on the old chestnut that this was only meant for a specific situation where the women were getting "uppity." First of all, every word of the NT was written for a specific situation; that doesn't invalidate it for universal application. Second, see 3:14,15—these verses are meant MORE universally than most of Paul's writing; he is giving Timothy a template for setting up all the new churches. (Cf. Andreas Kostenberger in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1Tim. 2:9-15* on "authentien")

## 7. Galatians 3:26-29

<sup>26</sup>You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, <sup>27</sup>for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

- Note: Ah, the mothership!! But notice v. 26 that we are all SONS of God (just as elsewhere we are all BRIDES of Christ, or sheep belonging to the Great Shepherd.) This verse is NOT teaching the eradication of all distinctions, but the unity of all in Christ. The major issue in view was whether Gentiles shared fully in the promises and people of God. Yes, says Paul, if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed, whether born a Gentile or a Jew. Other distinctions are equally meaningless in recommending us to God—it is only IN CHRIST that we are sons of God, and not by virtue of race, condition, or gender. These conditions are not meaningless in every situation, but they are meaningless regarding the acquisition of God's favor.

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### Footnotes:

1 Timothy 3:11 *gynea*: Greek word for women

**8. Philippians 2:2-11,14-16**

<sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

<sup>5</sup>Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature[a] God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,  
<sup>7</sup>but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.

<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!

<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

<sup>14</sup>Do everything without complaining or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe <sup>16</sup>as you hold out the word of life—

- Note: If it did not injure the Second Person of the Trinity to assume a subordinate role to his Father (or affect his ontological equality with his Father, cf. John 6,7,8, etc) then a subordinate role, correctly understood and voluntarily accepted, will only result in glory.
- Note #2: v.14, 15 For session 3—how to live when we disagree.

## OBJECTIONS, AND OBJECTIONS TO THE OBJECTIONS: SCHOLARLY DIFFERENCES AND HOW TO EVALUATE THEM

**1.** First, a word about scholars and scholarship. Not all scholarship is created equal. Harvard has a faculty member who passionately defends alien abductions. Princeton has a respected philosopher who writes and speaks about how parents should be allowed to kill their children up til age 2, because they aren't fully human until then. Do not allow yourself to be overly impressed by scholarly qualifications on either side of any argument. Scholars are no less exempt than anyone else from seeing what they want to see and ignoring inconvenient facts, and I'm not just talking about the people with whom I disagree.

a. 80/20 - no one is 100% right.

b. The personality factor - people have reasons for adding up the facts the way they want to see them.

**2.** Older objections centered around denial that the passages in question were validly considered part of the canon of Scripture. In the case of Paul, doubt was cast on his authorship of 1 Timothy (and other passages suggesting gender differentiation), while passages lifting up the ministry of women in general or a particular woman were considered authentic.

**3.** The creation stories were regarded as myths, pure and simple, and not to be trusted as revelation.

**4.** As Biblical scholarship proved beyond doubt that the letters attributed to Paul were actually written by Paul, and the JEPD theory of the OT fell into a mass of contradictions, new objections surfaced. The verses were there, but they didn't mean what you thought they meant. Paul's restriction on women elders in 1 Tim was meant only for that particular group of women, who (with what evidence I've always wondered) were creating difficulties in the church.

**5.** Most recently, scholars have been willing to grant that what it looks like Paul is saying, he is actually saying. However, the argument now goes, Paul was influenced by the ancient cultural moment in which he lived, where things like second class citizen ship of women and slavery were accepted.

**6.** Want to spend most time on this last, because it is the only one currently demonstrating any persuasive power, and also because it has serious corollary consequences if adopted.

### *The New Hermeneutic*—Cultural Influence on the Intent of Scripture

**1.** Claims to distinguish between transcultural seed ideas present in scripture

vs. culturally influenced actual words of scripture.

**2.** What does it do to our confidence in scripture if God allowed the writers to be inappropriately influenced by current cultural ideas?

- a. Hermeneutical Nestorianism
- b. "Seed idea" contradict clear commands
- c. New Barthianism

**3.** Doctrine of the Trinity under attack; subordination as an evil in itself

- a. Many evils done in the name of subordination
- b. Jesus redefined headship, authority, leadership
- c. Philippians 2

#### MOVING FORWARD POSITIVELY: AGREEING TO DISAGREE AND DISAGREEING AGREEABLY

**1.** Redeemer's official position

**2.** What to do if you disagree with it (!)

- a. Granting benefit of the doubt to those w/whom we disagree; not imputing motives
- b. Fellowship within the body in spite of important theological disagreements
  - 1) baptism
  - 2) charismatic gifts
  - 3) reformed theology

**3.** Deciding where you are on the spectrum, and then living in charity with those who are at a different place (if possible).

# **WOMEN AND MINISTRY**

## **REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Tim and Kathy Keller  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **The Debate in the Church**

Redeemer is committed to a high view of Scripture. We believe that, unless the Bible is God's word to us, we live without any real moral authority. "Right" and "wrong" would then become matters of personal taste or popular opinion. We would not really be able to talk of justice or truth at all, for there is no way to know objective truth.

Today, many people charge that the church and traditional Christianity are oppressive to women, denying them the right to the full use of their gifts in ministry. Many claim additionally that the Bible in general (and Paul in particular) is specifically guilty of this unjust treatment of women. These are extremely serious issues, especially for Redeemer Presbyterian. We are committed to the authority of the Bible and also to the liberation of all Christians to use their gifts in ministry.

The following paper represents many years of reflection, discussion, experimentation and practice. It is not an exegetical paper, studying passages in detail. It will, we hope, serve as a foundational paper for future patterns of women's ministry in the life of our congregation.

#### **The Problem of "Objectivity"**

I (Tim) recognize that it may seem easy for me to talk in an objective, studied way about what this or that verse means about this subject. I have had women say to me in the midst of such a discussion, "For you this is a discussion, but for me this is my life you're messing with!" I realize my disadvantage. But please realize that neither men nor women can come to Scripture "objectively". Both men and women will find it difficult to hear God's voice clearly and to submit to God's authority. But only when we do can we even begin to submit to one another.

#### **The Problem of Divisions**

The divisions among evangelical Christians over this issue are very tragic. For many centuries, the church was did not let the Scripture lead it away from the general oppression of women conducted by society. The church should have seen that the Bible does not teach the inferiority of women. Now, we fear, the fruit of the church's sin are coming home to it.

We live in an era of tension. In many churches, a particular view of women-in-ministry has become a basis for fellowship. Sometimes the message is: "though we believe in the Scripture, in Jesus as the Son of God, the need for repentance and faith in order to be born again, the importance of spreading the kingdom through the ministry of the Holy Spirit--if you don't share my view of women-in-ministry, there's the door!" Some 15 years ago, we would have entered the Presbyterian Church USA to minister, but we were told that our view of women-in-ministry precluded us from serving there. Though we would have worked beside people with different views, those on the other side of the fence would not work with us.

We do not want that to be the case at Redeemer. If you hold a view that differs from church policy or of the personal approach of the pastor, you should not feel bound to leave. We know what it was like to be "disfellowshipped" over this issue once! We will not do it to anyone else.

## THE TRINITARIAN PATTERN

"Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."  
-- I Corinthians 11:3

Here Paul says that the man is the "head" of the woman. But what does that mean?

### *1. Biblical headship involves servanthood.*

Let's look at the two analogies. First, Christ's headship of man is clearly one of authority (there is submission), and yet his authority is expressed through sacrificial service. He discovers our needs and meets them. "Christ did not please himself", therefore we must "please our neighbor for his good, to build him up" (Romans 15:2-3). A "head's" job is to use authority to please, to meet needs, to serve.

### *2. Biblical headship involves voluntary, respect-ful submission between equals.*

The second analogy is critical: "the head of Christ is God". Whereas Christ is of a higher order of being than human beings, the Father and the Son are equal in power, greatness, and dignity. The Son is not inferior to the Father at all. This second analogy proves that "headship" does not imply superiority. Phillipians 2:6 tells us that the Son was equal to the Father, but voluntarily took on a subordinate role, obeying the Father. He did this to accomplish our salvation.

What do we conclude about "headship" from the Christ-to-mankind and God-to-Christ analogies?

"Headship" is something given by one person to another. The giver is equal to the receiver; the receiver has a real and final authority, but uses it only to serve and please and build up the giver.

### **The traditionalist misunderstanding.**

What does it mean, then, when Paul says (when discussing the role of women in the church) "the head of the woman is man?" There is a traditional view that comes to Scripture with a prejudice. It believes that women are inferior in many ways, unfit for leadership. This leads to all sorts of conclusions: "it means women should stay home, should not have careers, should not take jobs of leadership, and so on." This view looks to the first analogy of headship (Christ and man) but not the second one (the Father and the Son), where there is no inferiority at all. Men and women are both given the mandate to rule the earth (Gen.1:28), and they are joint-heirs in God's grace (I Peter 3:7; Gal.3:28). Even here in I Cor.11 Paul makes it clear that there is equality of being. In v.8, he points out that Eve came from Adam, so "woman was created for man, not man for woman". Yet in v.11-12, he points out that each human male is born of a woman, so "man is not independent of woman". Man should not lord it over women with his authority, since "everything comes from God". All authority is derivative from God and partial. We exercise authority only as an act of submission to God.

### **The egalitarian misunderstanding.**

But others come to Paul's statement on headship and try to ignore it. Some say, "Paul only means that Eve came out of Adam." Many interpreters point out that the Greek meaning of "head" (kephale) means "source", not "authority". Virtually all evangelical feminist interpreters make this point. The problem is that, while Christ did create humankind, God did not create Christ, He was not the "source". A survey of 2,336 examples of the use of kephale in Greek literature reveals only two times that it is used as "source" and not "authority". Actually, Paul probably means kephale in both senses. In I Cor.11:8 he says, "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man."

There the two are combined. Paul grounds male headship in creation, while in I Cor.11:3 he grounds it in the Trinity.

Evangelical feminist interpreters also point out that Paul told slaves to submit to their masters and also told wives to submit to their husbands. Isn't it (the reasoning goes) natural to assume that, just as slavery has been abolished, that female submission should be as well? The difficulty is Paul's basis. Does Paul ever say: "Slaves, obey your masters because of the way you were created?" Does Paul ever ground the basis for slave-master submission in the nature of creation or in the nature of the Trinity? Many feminists say that Paul was simply accommodating himself to the times. But the relationship of man to woman in Paul is not based on customs of the times but the relationships within the Trinity itself.

The evangelical feminists do not come to the Scripture "neutrally" (who does?). They come with this conviction:

"Many Christians thus speak of a wife's being equal to her husband in personhood, but subordinate in function. However, this is just playing word games and is a contradiction in terms. Equality and subordination are contradictions."--L.Scanzoni and N.Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Word, 1974), p. 110

This statement is completely at odds with the God-Christ analogy. Christ was equal with the Father, yet took a submissive, subordinate role. It ignores the I Cor.11:3 definition of headship, just as does the traditionalist. If Jesus was equal to the Father in being but became voluntarily and temporarily subordinate to the Father in role--why would it be either inherently a) contradictory or b) unjust for women to do the same in marriage or in the church?

The Biblical pattern of headship is neither the traditional nor the feminist. The feminist rejects the idea that subordination can ever co-exist with equality (though this is the Basis of the Trinity's Relationship). The Traditionalist believes that Subordination assumes inequality. So Both of these groups Agree! They reject the Biblical concept of Headship as inconsistent.

Now let's see how the Trinitarian pattern of rule-and-submission-among-equals works itself out in marriage, in society in general, and in the church.

## **THE PATTERN IN MARRIAGE**

### *1. A head may never use authority to please self.*

In marriage, wives are told to give headship to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21ff.) This does not mean that the man simply can make all the decisions nor does it mean that he gets his way whenever there is a difference of opinion. Why? A "head" may never overrule his spouse simply to get his way or please himself (Rom.15:2-3). A head sacrifices his wants and needs to please and build up his partner (Eph.5:21ff.)

### *2. Headship is "tie-breaking" authority.*

Well, since this is also true of the wife (Eph.5:21--"submit to one another", then what is the difference? A head only exercises authority to over-rule when he believes his spouse is doing something destructive to her or the family. In a marriage, where there are only two "votes", how will the stalemate be broken in cases where there is not just a difference in taste or preference, but in cases where both parties believe the other is seriously mistaken. There can be no unity unless one person has the right to cast the deciding "vote". That person knows that, along with this "right" comes the greatest accountability and responsibility.

The Bible directs that a wife, when she marries, gives that "right/responsibility" freely to her husband. The husband realizes that ordinarily, his authority does not take the form of "over-

ruling"--in fact, the servant-model directs the "head" to usually put aside his own tastes and preferences in deference to pleasing his spouse. But when there is a "hung jury", and it is critical for one person to take both leadership and responsibility, the "head"'s service takes the form of initiation. He leads by over-ruling.

### *3. Why do men and women have these callings?*

It is fairly obvious that the need for "tie-breaking authority" is necessary in a marriage partnership. But why does God direct in his Word that it go to the man? Many people struggle the most with this very point. If they cannot see a practical reason for a command of God, they hesitate to commit to it.

#### We must reject the traditional rationale.

The traditionalist says: "Women must submit because women aren't fit for making decisions, for leadership." But many couples will admit that the wife is more decisive and has better judgment than the husband. Besides, the Bible no where gives that as a reason.

#### Our likeness to the Trinity.

The "reason" given by the Bible is simply that man-and-woman were made in the image of the Triune God. Women are called to follow Christ, who voluntarily subordinated himself in response to the Father's call. To put this in perspective let's ask this question: "Why was Christ the one who gave up authority to become subordinate? Why did Christ answer the call from the Father to give away authority?" We don't know, but if anything, it is a mark of his greatness, not his weakness! A case could be made, then, that women have this calling because they are greater than men!

### *4. The Biblical pattern calls both parties to submit.*

Many godly couples have come to realize, then, that the Biblical pattern is equally difficult for both parties. The woman and the man both must submit to their roles, their call from God.

Society traditionally gave to men the authority to over-rule their spouses for their own pleasure. But the Bible's "headship" authority is quite different, we have seen. As a result, many Christian men would gladly give up "tie-breaking", servant authority to their wives. They don't like the heavy responsibility for service and self-denial that "headship" brings. On the other hand, many women would gladly take the authority themselves, because they see how men abuse it, just as God predicted (Gen. 3:16). But both must struggle to submit to God's call.

### *5. Tapping into the mystery.*

When a Christian couple does so submit, however, they do so because God's Word directs them to. And after years of practice, they begin to see that this pattern somehow gets them in touch with something deep within them. Neither is demanding submission from one another, but after first submitting to God they are enabled to submit to one another's needs. It makes them both strong and tender, bringing them to serve one another yet in different ways.

Woman was created as a "helper" (Genesis 2). This word indicates no weakness at all, but complementary strength. In the Bible, God is our Help. A helper is someone who can help because he or she is stronger than the one being helped. For example, I can help my son with his homework because I know more than he. On the other hand, if I do his homework for him, I have stopped using my strength as a helper. In the same way, women have inherent strengths, insight and endurance and adaptability that men do not generally have. Women "help" their husbands through a willing submission through strength.

Mysterious it is! Real "masculinity" is full of tenderness and real "femininity" is full of strength. But they are still different from one another in many indefinable ways. Submission to God's

pattern for marriage gradually gets you back in touch with these deep truths and you begin to discover your true self.

## **THE PATTERN IN SOCIETY**

The next, logical question is: "is every man the head over every woman?" Paul's statement might lend itself to that conclusion, but the Bible's testimony is otherwise.

### *1. Women achieve leadership in society.*

Even in ancient Israel, at a time where women in society were the property of their husbands or fathers, women were endowed with unusual power in civil affairs. For example, women could not inherit property in those days, yet God specifically dictated that daughters could inherit the property of their father (Numbers 27:8). Also, Deborah eventually became the political leader, the "president" of Israel (Judges 4). There is no indication that she was acting illegally or extraordinarily.

There is therefore no indication that women in general society need to defer to men. Women can be executives, presidents of banks, or the president of a country. Does this seem inconsistent? Why would the Bible insist on a Trinitarian pattern in marriage, but ignore it in society?

Again, we must speculate a bit, because the Bible does not answer all of these "why" questions. One good possibility, however, may lay in the Biblical basis for democracy.

### *2. Democracy is for society while rule-submission is for our spiritual lives.*

Christians are for democracy because we believe in sin. Many folk believe in it for the opposite reason. Rousseau believed in democracy because he thought that people were so wise and good that no one is fit to be a slave. Of course, Christians wish for no one to be a slave, but we believe democracy is good because no one is fit to be a master! Because of sin, people misuse absolute authority. Thus it is clearly that monarchy, wise and good kings, would be a form of government that very much fits the Trinitarian pattern. God is a King, not a President, and our spiritual lives are based on monarchy. So why don't we have Kings? The answer is that we have to abolish monarchy due to sin. We have to treat all people as equal.

C.S. Lewis explains the Christian view of equality:

"This introduces a view of equality rather different from that in which we have been trained. I do not think that equality is one of those things (like wisdom or joy) which are good simply in themselves and for their own sakes. I think it is in the same class as medicine, which is good because we are ill, or clothes which are good because we are no longer innocent. I don't think the old authority of kings, priests, husbands, or fathers, and the old obedience of subjects, laymen, wives, and children was in itself a degrading or evil thing at all. I think it was intrinsically good and beautiful as the nakedness of Adam and Eve. It was rightly taken away because men became bad and abused it. To attempt to restore it now would be the same error as that of the Nudists. Legal and economic equality are absolutely necessary remedies for the Fall, and protection against cruelty.

"When equality is treated not as a medicine or safety-gadget but as an absolute ideal, we begin to breed that stunted and envious sort of mind that hates all superiority. That mind is the special disease of democracies, just as cruelty and servility are the special diseases of monarchies. It will kill us if it grows unchecked. The man who cannot conceive of a joyful and loyal obedience on the one hand, nor an unembarrassed and noble acceptance of obedience on the other, the man who has never even wanted to

kneel or bow, is a prosaic barbarian. There are men whose tap-root to Eden has been cut: whom no rumor of the polyphony, the dance, can reach--men to whom pebbles laid in a row are more beautiful than an arch. Yet even if they desire mere equality they cannot reach it. Where we are forbidden to honor a king, we honor millionaires, athletes, film-stars, even famous prostitutes and gangsters. For our spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food and it will gobble poison.

We must wear clothes since the Fall. Yes, but inside, under what Milton called "these troublesome disguises", we want the naked body, on proper occasions, to appear. It is still so in the marriage-chamber. In the same way, under the necessary outer "covering" of legal equality, the whole hierarchical dance and harmony of our deep and joyously accepted spiritual differences should be alive. It is there when, as Christians, as laymen, we can obey the priest all the more because the priest has no authority over us on the political level. It is there in our relation to parents and teachers--all the more because it is now a willed and wholly spiritual reverence.

It should also be there in marriage. Husbands have so horribly abused their power over women that to women, of all people, equality is in danger of appearing as an absolute ideal. Naomi Mitchison speaks of women so fostered on the defiant idea of equality that the mere sensation of the male embrace rouses an undercurrent of resentment. This is the tragi-comedy of the modern woman; taught by Freud to consider the act of love the most important thing in life, and then inhibited by feminism from that internal surrender which alone can make it a complete emotional success.

This whole question is of immense practical importance. Every intrusion of the spirit that says, 'I'm as good as you' into our family and spiritual life is to be resisted as jealously as every intrusion of bureaucracy or privilege into our politics. Let us wear equality, but let us undress at night."

In summary, the pattern of rule-and-submission is greatly muted in society because of sin. People abuse authority, so politically, all authority must be elected authority--and all individuals must have access to places of authority.

## **THE PATTERN IN THE CHURCH**

When we come to Scriptural teaching on women-in-the-church, we discover again a different pattern. Unlike in marriage, all women do not submit to all men. But unlike society, there is a Trinitarian pattern, it is not muted.

### **On the one hand, women are clearly partners with men in ministry.**

The Christian church is far ahead of Judaism and pagan religions in this. Women were full members of the covenant community (Acts 1:14). They were deaconesses (I Tim.3:11; Romans 16:2); this meant they were ministry leaders, initiating and supervising ministries. It is wrong, therefore, to say that women cannot be area directors in para-church ministries, or to say that women cannot lead evangelistic, discipling, educational, or teaching ministries. Tabitha (Acts 9:30) was a leader of mercy ministry to the poor, while Euodia and Syntyche (Phil.4:2,3) were Paul's evangelistic associates. Priscilla disciplined and instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26) and led a house church (Rom.16:4,5). As in the Old Testament (Exodus 15), women were prophets and did prophesy. They spoke and prayed in public worship (I Cor.11:5). It appears from this that there are no ministry gifts or ministries that are forbidden to women.

### **And yet, Paul draws some limits.**

The office of elder is forbidden to women. Elders are to be men (I Tim.3:1-3). In I Timothy 2:11, Paul forbids women to "teach or have authority" over men. In I Cor. 14:35-36 women are not to

take part in determining whether a teacher is teaching sound doctrine. (Note: Paul's command for women to "keep silent in church" cannot mean that they may never speak publically. That would contradict I Cor.11 where women are told to pray and prophesy. It means they are to keep silent when the prophets are judged.)

Elders are leaders who admit or dismiss people from the church, and they do "quality control" of members' doctrine. These are the only things that elders exclusively can do. Others can teach, disciple, serve, witness.

There are a number of qualifications for this office--God must call and give elder gifts. When the congregation elects elders, it is not to elect people it likes, but people God has gifted along the lines of I Tim.3:1ff. Most men and all women do not qualify and will never be elders. It is not something they can attain through hard work. It is a calling from God the King.

Why does God call certain ones? Because they are inherently more worthy? That has never been the case. It is the same question: why did the Father rule while the Son submitted? The answer is that both were great and wise persons who did not resent the submission-and-rule pattern but rejoiced in it.

Does exclusion from the eldership mean that women are inherently unfit for leadership? The only thing we can conclude is that women do not fit this particular kind of leadership. Consider the types of leaders in Israel. There were prophets, kings, priests, and elders. Though kings had physical, political power over the priests and elders and prophets, they could not take over their duties. Saul, for example, was forbidden from doing priestly work, offering sacrifices.

Women were prophets and also were heads of state (a queen-Athaliah, and a judge-Deborah). On the other hand women could not be priests or elders. Not only were women precluded from the priesthood, but all men not of the tribe of Levi. Was God being arbitrary? No, he was acting like a King. He called some people into some kinds of leadership and precluded other people from other kinds. Sometimes the preclusion was done on the basis of gender, other times on the basis of nationality. All people gladly submitted to his Lordship if they understood his rights over them.

### **Women and non-elder males can use any and all spiritual gifts in ministry.**

Though the job of elder is a high calling, every believer is a "prophet, priest, and king". All non-elders in the church must and can use their gifts in the church, whatever they are.

In a nutshell, our position is this: whatever a non-ruling elder male can do in the church, a woman can do. We do not believe that I Timothy 2:11 or I Cor.14:35-36 precludes women teaching the Bible to men or speaking publically. To "teach with authority" (I Tim.2:11) refers to disciplinary authority over the doctrine of someone. For example, when an elder says to a member: "You are telling everyone that they must be circumcised in order to be saved--that is a destructive, non-Biblical teaching which is hurting people spiritually. You must desist from it or you will have to leave the church." That is "teaching authority"--it belongs only to the elders.

Thus, women at Redeemer will be free to use all the gifts, privately and publically. There are no restrictions on ministry at all. There is a restriction on the office of elder. Why? Because the Bible precludes it, and therein it points us back to the Trinitarian pattern which is strong in marriage and muted in society, but which is practiced in the church.

Aren't Paul's prohibitions to women in authority specific instructions just for those local church situations?

Evangelical feminists have for years recognized the difficulty of denying Paul's preclusions to women and yet maintaining a high view of Biblical authority. There are two ways they have argued:

*1. The first way for evangelical feminists to respond to Paul is to insist that his advice about women and authority has only to do with particular churches at that time. We are told we must distinguish between absolute norms and circumstantial advice, instruction given only to some churches in a particular circumstance.*

The serious problem with this view is that everything Paul wrote he wrote to specific situations. All his writings were letters, not theological essays. When we hear Paul say, "In Christ there is no Jew and Greek, no male and female" he has written it to Galatians who are embroiled in a particular problem. When he says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" in I Timothy, he is speaking to a man (Timothy) whose job it was to plant churches and set up an organizational structure. I Timothy is all about how to appoint elders and deacons, how churches are to function. If anything, I Timothy 2:12 could be said to be a general principle in a book of general principles about how churches are to be operated!

But our point here is that even I Timothy is a particular letter to a particular situation. Everything Paul teaches is to a specific situation. To distinguish between "timeless" and "temporary" is to set up a "canon within a canon", and one based on your own opinion. In fact, if the ordination of women is a "justice issue", then surely to preclude women from speaking or having authority in even one church would be horribly wrong. This leads us to the second approach.

*2. The second way for evangelical feminists to respond to Paul is to frankly admit he was in error.*

This is the position of virtually all folks who favor women's ordination to all offices.

Feminist interpreters continually point out that there are ambiguities and difficulties in the passages on women. What does it mean that "because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head" (I Cor.11:11)? Or "women will be saved through childbearing" (I Tim.2:15)? By bringing up these difficulties, it is often implied that "these are difficult passages and who knows what they really mean?" But actually, Paul's basic points are extremely clear. Hardly anyone doubts that Paul meant to exclude women from ruling office. So the real question is: how do we regard his view?

The basic answer of evangelical feminists is: he was wrong. Usually, this kind of blunt statement is avoided in print, but it is everywhere assumed. One of the first evangelicals who wrote in favor of women's ordination was the most frank:

"Because these two perspectives--the Jewish and the Christian--are incompatible, there is no satisfying way to harmonize the Pauline argument for female subordination [which Jewett considers "Jewish"] with the larger Christian vision of which the great apostle himself was the primary architect." (P.Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, p.113)

In other words, Paul's teaching on women cannot be avoided. It is there. But it is wrong, contradicting the rest of the Bible. We are, then, really back to the same thing--a "canon within a canon", set up arbitrarily, determining which parts of Scripture are "higher, and purer" and which parts are backward, retrogressive. If Scripture alone is our final authority, where we get a standard for judging Scripture?

Virginia Mollenkott, an evangelical feminist, gives great insight into how it was necessary to change a view of Scripture to accommodate women's ordination. In an interview with *The Other*

Side magazine (TOS) she tells how she was speaking at a conference with Paul Jewett and others on women in the church.

*Mollenkott:* Anyway, the night before Jewett spoke, some of us had a long and painful private meeting. We were discussing whether he dared say his thing on the Pauline self-contradictions. We decided he didn't dare to because it would jeopardize the job of the person who had set up the conference. So Jewett retreated into what is the safe thing to do: that is, talk about Jesus' behavior...

TOS: If we interpret the Old Testament by the New, we have some sort of criterion for the Old Testament. But how do we tell in Paul? If his teaching about women in merely cultural, then maybe what he says about justification is, too....

*Mollenkott:* It seems to me that at this point we have to rely on good, careful, scholarly exegesis. We have to place passages in context...We have to pay attention to word choice, literary form...

TOS: But...your approach will help us find out what a passage means, but so far you haven't said much that I can see which helps me pick out what passages are true. In literature it is one process to determine what something means and quite another to determine if it's true...Now how can I tell which are records of errors and which are normative?

*Mollenkott:* When we find a passage, a spirit which runs all the way through the Bible--at that point I know which one is for all time and which one for the hardness of our hearts. Another guideline is the analogy of what Jesus said and did. If something doesn't fit the life and teaching of Jesus, again I know which is for all time...

TOS: I am gradually moving toward your position...But if I wind up where you are, I am seriously considering resigning from The Other Side. Our stance has been to call America and the church back to the Bible. It seems to me that calling people to that is one very important thing which accepting your position makes hard to do. Maybe I should just clear out and go work for some less evangelical magazine...

*Mollenkott:* I don't think you should do that...I think before long many, many evangelicals will come along toward a more scholarly approach to Scripture...Let the rest have their iron maiden of a definition of inspiration which they use to oppress other people. Let them declare themselves as fundamentalists. Let's the rest of us get on with the job."--The Other Side, May/June 1976

This interview does show that it requires a shift in one's view of Scripture to work around Paul's limitations on women's authority in the church. Mollenkott says that we can choose the normative from relative passages on two criterion: 1) If a teaching is repeated more often in the Bible, an apparently contradictory one can be rejected if it appears less often, or 2) if a teaching contradicts the life and teaching of Jesus, it can be rejected.

But even these criterion do not work, if you hope to find Biblical support for the ordination of women! Consider the first criterion. In the Old Testament, God is the "husband" of Israel, who is the "wife"? In the New Testament, Christ is the "husband" of the church as we are the "bride" of Christ. When God wishes to express his loving authority over us he depicts us a feminine and himself as masculine. This is a repeated, broad-based Biblical theme, throughout. All believers are "feminine" toward God, for we give ourselves in surrender to him. See Romans 7:1-6. By putting ourselves in his arms, he bears his fruit into the world through our bodies.

And consider the second criterion: Jesus' life and ministry. Not one of his apostles was female. Feminists are quick to point out that he was adapting to his culture. But now they are doing the same thing to Jesus that they did with Paul. What, really is the standard, now, by which

we judge Jesus? If women's ordination is a real justice issue, can we excuse our Lord on the basis of cultural pressure? Was he the type of person to succumb to popular opinion?

We feel that there is a deep inconsistency in the phrase "evangelical feminism". The feminists who are consistent recognize the Bible as a sexist book throughout. They reject it. The feminists who try to hold to complete Biblical authority have, really, an impossible balancing act to conduct.

### *The Pattern at Redeemer Presbyterian Church*

On the basis of the above position paper, how will women function in ministry at Redeemer Presbyterian church?

### **Leadership structure at Redeemer Presbyterian.**

We hope to have two boards of officers: elders and deacons/deaconesses.

#### *The Deaconesses themselves.*

The Deaconesses will be women elected by the congregation who will do discipling, counseling, and shepherding in the church, particularly among the women. Spiritual maturity is the qualification. They will probably also exercise a teaching ministry in the church, depending on their gifts.

#### *The Deaconesses and the Deacons.*

Together with the deacons, they will equip and guide people into ministry in the church. At Redeemer we want to help laypeople begin and conduct ministries. Deacons and Deaconesses will do this together.

#### *The Deaconesses and the Elders.*

The church will continue to have broad-based planning and strategizing. Deaconesses will serve on planning/oversight committees (e.g. evangelism, education, worship) with other officers and non-officers. Deaconesses could chair such a committee if the group so elects. Also, the Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses will meet regularly for strategy and oversight of the church. In matters of discipline and doctrine, the elders have the final say--they have "tie-breaking authority"! Also, the elders represent the church at denominational meetings. But deaconesses will sit in positions of influence and will have regular part (along with many women on program committees) into the strategizing and decision-making process of the church.

The real challenge will not be to create a structure, but to create a climate in which men and women truly work together as equal ministry partners in the church, still recognizing the principle of male headship in the eldership. Will we really let women lead ministries? Will we really release women's gifts to witness, nurture, and serve in the church? Will we incorporate the wisdom of all the mature Christians into the planning of the church? Or will we have a paternalistic attitude which in thousands of subtle ways puts women down and does not listen to their advice or concerns? That remains to be seen! But that is our goal--to create a community that even non-believing feminists recognize as not oppressive, yet one that honors the Biblical distinction between the genders.

### **CONCLUSION**

We know from experience that our position on women-in-ministry dissatisfies many people. Many friends from the traditional evangelical church find it far too "liberal" and "permissive", while many other friends on the other side still feel it is oppressive. Our position is not totally

unique. See J. Hurley's book, *Man and Women in Biblical Perspective* or S.Foh's book, *Women and the Word of God*. They come close to where we are.

The fact remains that nearly everyone we meet is more "conservative" or else more "liberal" than we are. Thus we appeal to our friends to work with us on this. We do not wish to make this issue a cause of division, as we said above. We see no reason why friends with the same view of the Bible cannot work together, all the while influencing each other and refining one another's viewpoint in order to become truly Biblical. Please be partners with us!