

Women In Ministry

Brief Explanation of Biblical Passages

We support and champion women in ministry and leadership. We believe God calls and gifts both women and men for leadership in the church and in the world.

Key terms:

Complementarian - the view that men and women are equal in personhood but have different and complementary roles and responsibilities in marriage, family life and in the church. Men have a responsibility to exercise headship in their homes and church family.

Egalitarian - men and women are equal in personhood and there are no gender-based limitations on the roles of men and women. God calls and gifts both women and men for leadership. There are no gender restrictions on what roles men and women can fulfill in the church, home, and society.

Brief explanation of Biblical Passages

We are seeking to be Biblically faithful and see in Scripture God calling, gifting and using both women and men in Kingdom work, including in leadership roles. Here are some key points to help us be good Bible students as we understand Scripture both in the context of the day it was written and seek to faithfully apply it to today. Much more has been written on interpreting each of these Scriptures; we seek here to present key points primarily gathered from the website: <https://margmowczko.com/>

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 - Shouldn't women be silent in church?

- This passage is about asking certain women in Corinth to be quiet in church meetings. These women wanted to learn but were asking too many basic questions during church meetings. Paul's solution was to tell these women to be quiet in church and ask their husbands, who were typically more educated at this point in history & culture, their questions later at home.
- Paul, who wrote this passage, acknowledges in other writings that Corinthian women prayed and prophesied out loud at church. (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:5; 12:7-11, 28; 14:26)
- This passage was addressing a specific concern at a specific time and location and is not stating a principal to be followed in churches for all time.

1 Timothy 2:12 -It seems to say, Paul didn't permit a woman to teach or to have any authority over a man?

- Some scholars propose that these verses are aimed at an ignorant, uneducated woman (or women)
- The Bible does show that godly women taught men important lessons (e.g. Lemuel's mother in Proverbs 31:1; Priscilla in Acts 18:18-28; Anna the prophetess in Luke 2:36-38; Huldah in 2 Kings 22:8-20; Deborah in Judges 4 & 5)
- Scholars suggest that the Greek word *didaskhein* "to teach" in 1 Tim 2:12 is tied to the Greek word *authentein* "to bully/coerce" or to usurp. If so, it means the warning was not against a woman who was teaching sound doctrine in an agreeable manner, but against a woman (or women) who was teaching in a domineering or controlling manner. The same warning could have been given to a man who was acting in a similar way.
- To say that Paul is using the creation order of male first and female second to state a set chain of command is missing the point of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2, which shows the equality, affinity and unity between the first man and woman.
- The Hebrew word for "help" used in Genesis 2 is *ezer*, and it is mostly used in the Hebrew Bible for God's help. Importantly, *ezer* is qualified by the word *kenegdo*. *Kenegdo* tells us that Eve was a

person who was similar to Adam, who corresponded to him, who was his equal counterpart. Eve was equal to Adam in her being, or personhood. Eve was also equal to Adam in her purpose and function.

- The Greek word *hesuchia*, used in 1 Tim 2:12 means “calmness” or “quietness” with the implication of “keeping one’s seat.” This same word is also used in 1 Tim 2:11. Paul wanted the woman (or women) to learn quietly and behave with decorum. Learning quietly and submissively was (and is) the usual behaviour of a good student. A calm, cooperative attitude rather than strict silence is what is meant here. It does not state that a woman is to remain completely silent in church meetings.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 - Aren’t men “the head,” the leader, of women?

- In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul states that the man is the “head” (*kephalē*) of the woman. Many Christians have assumed that the word *kephalē* has the meaning of leader, ruler, authority or chief person, but *kephalē* was rarely, if ever, used with these meanings in ancient Greek.
- Several New Testament scholars argue that *kephalē* means source or origin in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Therefore we could paraphrase this verse as saying “I want you realize the source (or origin) of every man is Christ, and the source (or origin) of (the first) woman is (the first) man, and the source (or origin) of Christ is God.”
- Paul was not writing about male authority in 1 Cor 11:2-16, but about the mutual interdependence between men and women. In his letters, Paul never used any of the many Greek words for leadership in reference to husbands.
- Nevertheless, Paul wanted men and women to uphold some gender distinctions involving traditional hairstyles (or the covering of the head by women) when they were gathered for worship. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is about respectable appearances and behaviour during Christian worship where women, as well as men, prayed and prophesied aloud. This passage is not about any kind of male leadership or “headship”.

1 Timothy 3 - Doesn’t Paul exclude women in his list of qualifications to be an overseer in the church?

- Note that the masculine personal pronouns that appear in many English translations of these passages—and the word “man” that appears in many English translations of 1 Timothy 3:1 (and Titus 1:6a) are entirely absent in the original Greek.
- 1 Tim 3:2 (and Titus 1:6) is usually translated as “the husband of one wife.” Literally it says “a one-woman man.” This was an idiom of the day; care must always be taken not to apply idioms too literally.
- If taken literally, the *one-woman man* requirement would rule out unmarried, widowed and divorced men, as well as women, from being church leaders. Yet Paul says elsewhere that being single and celibate enables people to serve God better (1 Cor 7:32-35.) Paul himself was single.
- The intent of this phrase is marital faithfulness in a church leader who is already married. In other words, faithful monogamy that applies to both men and women.

1 Peter 3 (in particular 1 Peter 3:7) and the household codes in Ephesians 5:21-33/Colossians 3-4
How does this apply in the home? Isn't the man the head of the household? Aren't women supposed to submit to the husband's authority?

- These passages advocate for mutual submission, husbands and wives submitting to one another.
- Peter's instructions, literally translated in 1 Peter 3:7, are: "Husbands, in the same way [be submissive] as you live together with your wives . . ." This is a radical statement considering the typical Greco-Roman view of women and wives during Peter's day.
- 1 Peter 3:7 also states that women are weaker than men. Certainly, in the Greco-Roman society of the day women were greatly disadvantaged, holding considerable less privileges and rights than men, including the fact that they were unable to own land. Women were also, usually, physically weaker than men. Peter wanted men to acknowledge the vulnerable situation of their wives, understand their privilege as men and not exploit their wives but respect, honour and care for them.
- Peter tells the husbands to assign honour to their wives because, in Christ, men and women are coheirs. The Greek of 1 Peter 3:7 uses language which unmistakably highlights the mutuality and equality of Christian husbands and wives. The NLT captures this meaning in their translation: "...you husbands must give honor to your wives. Treat your wife with understanding as you live together. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God's gift of new life."
- Peter sums up his passage on submission by saying, "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble." (1 Peter 3:8) This is what submission between husbands and wives looks like.
- The purpose of the household codes in Ephesians 5-6 and Colossians 3-4 was not to endorse or reinforce the power structures of Greco-Roman households. Rather, one purpose was to lessen the potential for abuse that often came with the unequal power in ancient households. Paul taught love and equity because you do not abuse or mistreat the person you love, and you do not abuse or mistreat the person you treat with equity. Furthermore, the household code in Ephesians follows on from teaching on Spirit-led living, which includes mutual participation in worship and mutual submission in relationships. These codes were not primarily about gender roles or even gender. They were about power and correcting power imbalances.

Further Common Questions:

1. Where are the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada on women in ministry?

The CBAC has been ordaining women for a long time. The first woman was ordained by the convention in 1954. The CBAC supports the ordination and leadership of women in ministry, however it has not made this theological issue a test for membership in the CBAC. Therefore, within the CBAC family, we have both egalitarian and complementarian churches and leaders.

In our region, the Atlantic Society for Biblical Equality (ASBE) supports & promotes the equal partnership of men and women in the home, church and community. The state ASBE's mission is: ASBE promotes the biblical message of full equality between women and men to advance the kingdom of God in Atlantic Canada. ASBE envisions a future where all believers are free to fully exercise their gifts in the church and beyond, with the full support of their Christian communities. See more at <https://www.biblicalequality.org/>

2. Won't this lead to a slippery slope? Are we using culture as our guide?

We are not using culture as our guide. We are seeking to follow Jesus and be Biblically faithful. From careful Bible study and historical study, we believe it is faithful to God in honouring, valuing and using the gifts of both women and men in ministry and leadership. This belief is grounded in our understanding of God's intent in Genesis 1-2, which is then practically re-envisioned through the example and teachings of Jesus, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on both genders on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and seen through the new community God has been establishing through the church (Gal. 3:28).

NOTES: