

# Gender Issues

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## *Detailed Outline Part 1 of 3*

### **Introduction**

- A. A big question in the study of biblical eldership is whether women are permitted to be elders.**
- B. This subject is polarizing. In the western world, in most developed countries, egalitarianism continues to grow—the belief that the roles of men and women are interchangeable, except of course in their respective participation in procreation and obviously physical differences.**
- C. But the Bible has very specific statements regarding women’s roles in teaching and leadership situations. As Bible-believing Christians, we need to wrestle with these passages, honestly and submissively.**
- D. We cannot go into every aspect of the subject of gender in the church, home, and society.**
  - 1. Some of the arguments are quite technical, detailed. I am quite familiar with most of them.
  - 2. Many books have been written. Both Alex Strauch, another member of the Biblical Eldership Resources team, and I both have written extensively on this crucial subject.
  - 3. See the Recommended Resources panel.
- E. Here I am presenting the broad sweep of how the gender issue affects the ministry and roles of elders, particularly in the area of authority and teaching.**

### **I. Foundational Biblical Principles**

- A. We believe all of Scripture is inspired and without error.**

*“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16–17 NASB)*

- 1. Scripture is God’s Word and is inspired. It is without error.
- 2. It is useful for application to the Christian walk.
- 3. Not just a matter of being right, but of doing what is right and acting rightly, “equipped for every good work.”
- 4. And Scripture should affect how we order our churches. In fact, Paul says this:  
*“I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15)*

## **B. Paul's writings are inspired by God also.**

1. Why do I stress this point?
  - a) Most of the New Testament teaching on gender roles are in Paul's letters.
  - b) Views that reflect a low view of Scripture
    - 1) Some hold to a most extreme view that Paul was a misogynist, prejudiced, and a chauvinist.
    - 2) Others are not quite so extreme, but talk of Paul being inadvertently influenced by the culture of his day.
    - 3) These assume that his writings were not inspired, at least not when it comes to gender issues.
  - c) Others say that he knowingly acquiesced to the culture of his day, so as not to cause any stumbling block for the gospel. But, if you follow his trajectory, then at some point, when people accept the gospel and grow in their faith, then they will realize what Paul was doing. However, in reasoning like this, we place the entire Bible on shaky grounds, for how can we discern what is on a trajectory to something else, and what isn't?
  - d) Today, there are new, novel ways for interpreting the key passages that before the last 50–100 years were never considered to be orthodox. In some cases, some interpreters have devised a new hermeneutic for revising what had been virtually universally accepted as the clear meaning of the key passages.
  - e) So the writings of Paul are crucial to the subject of gender and the church, in particular for our study, the role of elders.
  - f) We must begin with the fact that, whatever they mean, they are inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.
2. Listen to what Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says of Paul's writings:

*"... Just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." (2 Peter 3:15–16)*
3. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter teaches that Paul's teachings are on the same level as "the rest of the Scripture."
4. Notice, even he found some of Paul's writings difficult to understand. I don't feel so bad when I struggle with some of his writings; I am in good company!
5. But, note also, even in Peter's time, the writings of Paul were being distorted.
6. To ignore or handle carelessly the letters of Paul is to tamper with Scripture. We need to take His writings very, very seriously. We dismiss them at our own peril.

**C. The biblical authors wrote within certain cultural contexts and these things need to be taken into careful consideration.**

1. Too easily people today dismiss teachings of Scripture by “punting” to the cultural issues. It goes something like this: “I don’t do that thing today, because the teaching of Scripture is confined to or makes sense only in the culture of that day.”
2. However, God at times did take culturally significant activities and immortalized them for the church across all cultures. For example, baptism was a common practice used in the first century by other cults and religions, as an initiatory rite. The same is true with the Lord’s Supper, a communal meal for adherents of a religion. These were not unique to Christianity. But God in his timeless plan has taken these cultural/religious symbols, lifted them out of their first-century context, and intended them for Christians until Christ returns.
3. Some teaching is clearly rooted in first-century practice, but is not presented with any understanding or rationale for enduring practice.

*“No longer drink water exclusively, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” (1 Tim. 5:23)*

*“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.” (Rom. 16:16; see also 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26)*

We would expect that if God had wanted us to follow these practices (take wine for medicinal purposes, greeting with a holy kiss), there might be a biblical rationale presented that loosens the activity from a specific cultural application to become more universal in practice. Otherwise, we would be traveling only by foot or boat (as Jesus or Paul did), or continually sending home for our cloaks, parchments and books (2 Tim. 4:13). Obviously, there needs to be a principle for distinguishing that which was casual activity, time-culture dependent activities and that which is to be enduring. In fact, every command of Scripture was given in a particular cultural setting.

I believe the interpretive or hermeneutical principle to follow is this: that which is taught and explained in a way that makes clear that the teaching is to be universal should be followed by the church through the ages and across cultures.

4. The writers of Scripture were not bound by their culture. They never shrank back from teaching things that were countercultural or unpopular. For example:

*“But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.” (Gal. 2:3)*

*“But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.” (Gal. 5:11)*

*“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer . . .” (Acts 17:32)*

# Gender Issues

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## *Detailed Outline Part 2 of 3*

### **II. The Biblical Passages**

#### **A. Galatians 3:28**

1. This is a foundational verse.
2. We need to read it carefully. We need to read it for all it's worth, and we also should not to read too much into it, things that are not there. Let's pick up the context:  
  
*<sup>24</sup> Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. <sup>26</sup> For 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, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*  
(Gal. 3:24–29 NASB)
3. This idea, that women are accepted on an equal basis before God, was revolutionary. Notice, it says "neither male nor female." That was just as revolutionary as "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man . . ."
4. In context, equality has to do with our "sonship," for we "are all one in Christ Jesus." We share in the promise of Abraham, because we have become his descendants through faith.
5. Some claim this passage indicates all role distinctions are removed. So for example, every thing that is open for a man to do, a woman can do, including being an elder or a pastor.
6. However, the equality in this context says nothing about roles in the church or marriage. It only speaks of our relationship to Christ. Or as Peter puts it, each one of us, male and female, is a "fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Peter 5:7b).
7. Clearly, Galatians 3:28 cannot set aside all role distinctions because there are some things in Scripture that remain different for men and women. For example, a man is free to marry a woman, but a woman is not free to marry a woman. And a woman is free to marry a man, but a man is not free to marry another man. Galatians 3:28 does not remove that role distinction. So therefore, Galatians 3:28 is not an all-encompassing statement. We look to the context to determine the scope of the oneness in Christ Jesus. And the context speaks about our sonship in Christ, our relationship as fellow heirs of God's blessing.
8. So, we conclude that while Galatians 3:28 is an important verse for women in that it asserts there is no difference in how we are accepted by God, it does not address the issue of women in leadership or teaching or of women as elders.

9. At best, Galatians 3:28 leaves the question unaddressed. We need to look to other Scriptures to help us understand what God has to say about gender roles in the leadership of the church.
10. Principle of hermeneutics: let Scripture interpret Scripture. Let the clearer passages inform our understanding of the less clear passages.

**B. 1 Timothy 2:12–14**

*<sup>12</sup> But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.*

*<sup>13</sup> For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (1 Tim. 2:12–14)*

1. We don't have time to go into the details, but I will outline a few observations.
2. Teaching and authority are affected by gender in the church:
  - a) Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes it clear that there **is** gender role distinction in the teaching ministry of the church and in the authority structure of the church. These limitations are:
    - 1) Women are not to teach men in the church.
    - 2) Women are not to exercise any authority role over men in the church.
  - b) Other passages indicate that women have a wide-ranging ministry in teaching other women and children, but not when it involves teaching or having authority over men.
3. The meaning of "teach or exercise authority"
  - a) Some may debate the meaning of the words "to teach or exercise authority."
  - b) But the scholars who worked on major English translations render this the same.
4. The reason for the instruction
  - a) Notice that Paul gives his reason for the instruction. It is not simply to fit in with the culture or acquiesce to the cultural norms. He roots his teaching in the creation narrative, the order of creation of Adam first and the nature of the fall. This rationale transcends cultural limitations.
  - b) Now, there is a popular interpretation that Paul is addressing unruly women in Ephesus, where Timothy resided when he received this letter from Paul. According to this interpretation, those women were teaching in an authoritarian, oppressive way. That kind of teaching is never permissible in the church. But teaching by women that is done in a Christlike way would be acceptable and permissible.
  - c) The problem with that interpretation is that is simply not what the passage here says. I would ask this question: Why would Paul address in this passage women who were teaching in a wrong sort of manner, when the specific people he does mention by name in his letter that are teaching wrongly, are in fact men? The most natural interpretation is that Paul was prohibiting women from teaching or having authority over men, just as it is rendered by the translations.

5. Paul is giving a command.
  - a) Finally, Paul does not present this teaching as an optional idea if it fits in with your situation. He says, “I do not allow . . .” Some translations render it “I do not permit.”
  - b) This is a strong way of asserting his point.
  - c) He intends his teaching to be binding, non-optional command.
6. This command transcends time and culture. He roots his teaching in the creation and fall narratives:
  - a) The order of creation (Adam first and then woman)
  - b) The nature of the fall (Eve was deceived, Adam was not—he knowingly sinned)

7. Problematic verse

*<sup>15</sup> But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.” (2 Tim 2:15)*

Some argue that verse 15 confuses the whole issue.

- a) “Women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”
- b) Well, that verse is a difficult one, and it is difficult no matter what view you hold (unless you want to say that Paul was simply wrong in v. 15 like he was wrong in vv. 12–14).
- c) So whatever this verse means, it does not affect our interpretation of Paul’s command one way or the other.

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## *Detailed Outline Part 3 of 3*

### **III. The Biblical Passages (cont.)**

#### **C. 1 Corinthians 14:34–35**

*“The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.”*

*(1 Cor. 14:34–35 NASB)*

1. It is clear that this verse is not referring to absolute silence. No one suggests that a woman can't sing. So what does this injunction against “speaking” mean?
2. This verse in context refers to the give-and-take in the church over teaching and prophecy.
3. Women are not to enter into that, but to be silent. If they want to interact as the prophets and teachers do, then they should do that with their husbands at home.
4. There are many things we could say about this passage, and difficulties with applying it. But, suffice it to say, this passage aligns with 2 Timothy 2:1 in restricting women from teaching over the whole church.
5. Since a big part of being an elder is teaching and defending right doctrine, it follows that elders therefore must be men.

**D. We conclude then that God in his wisdom and order has commanded that men are to be in the primary leadership and teaching roles that affect the whole congregation.**

### **IV. The Early Church Example**

**A. We note in support of this viewpoint, that Christ chose men to be designed as his apostles. While there were women in his entourage, they were not named as apostles.**

**B. In the early church council in Acts 15:5–6 we see the followers of Christ debating the issue of how to accept Gentiles into the newly formed church.**

*“But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.’ The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.” (Acts 15:5–6)*

**C. It was the apostles and elders who came together, all men, to deal with theological issue.**

**D. While in verse 22 of the same chapter we discover the whole church entered into the decision, clearly the apostles and elders were the ones who debated and then led in the final decision.**

## V. Elder Qualifications

- A. **"Husband of one wife"** (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6)
- B. **Notice this qualification is stated in terms of masculinity. It doesn't use the word "spouse" or even hint at female elders.**
- C. **Be "able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict" and "apt to teach."**  
*"... Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:9)*
- D. **Women are restricted from doing this in regards to men (see 1 Tim 2:12).**

## VI. Application

- A. **This does not mean women cannot teach or have any authority in the church.**
- B. **Women may be gifted as teachers and leaders.**
  - 1. In fact, some women are better teachers and better leaders than men.
  - 2. But, that is not the issue here.
  - 3. The question is the sphere of that teaching and leadership.
- C. **There are many opportunities in women's ministries, children's work, or discipling.**
- D. **Yes, women may even have the gift of pastoring, and they can exercise that gift in pastoring other women and children.**  
*"Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children." (Titus 2:3-4)*
- E. **In my understanding, women are permitted to do almost most anything that men can do in the church provided:**
  - 1. They are not teaching or exercising authority over a man.
  - 2. They are spiritually gifted and qualified for that ministry.
- F. **So, I conclude that women are free to be coordinators, facilitators, of a wide variety of ministries that include men. But if a particular area of service requires teaching biblical truths or involve authority, then women need to defer to men in those roles.**
- G. **Beyond this, there is considerable freedom in Christ to serve in the body of Christ.**

## Conclusion

- H. **What we have presented here goes counter to many cultures and practices today. But, we must be committed to the Word of God.**
- I. **The biblical teaching on the roles of men and women in the church is rooted in timeless, transcendent truths—going back to the order of creation and nature of the fall and its effect on the relationship between the sexes.**
- J. **The Bible teaches that the role of elder is the responsibility of the men, not the women.**