

At St. Andrew we understand the Bible is the word of God.¹ From our study of God's word we believe it is God's will for both women and men to exercise their gifts for ministry in his church. What follows is a brief treatment on what the Bible does and does not say about women and church leadership.

In The Beginning

The Book of Genesis explains that God created man and woman in God's image.² The man's solitude was judged to be not good and so God created woman to help him and rule with him.³

Equal at Creation

Genesis says Eve was created to be Adam's "helpmate". The Hebrew word translated helpmate (*ezer*) appears in scripture several other places, usually referring to God as mankind's *ezer*.⁴ Eve being Adam's *ezer* does not mean she's inferior to him or under his authority.⁵ Both sexes equally bear the image of God.

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 NIV)

The Fall

Eve and Adam's relationship with each other and with God was wonderful until...

Desiring to be "like God", they rebelled against God.⁶ Unhappy with their creaturely limitations, they pushed God away, believing that in so doing they might become godlike.⁷ As a result, enmity now exists between man and woman. Her life's desire will be to serve and seek approval from him (instead of from her God) and he will rule over her (instead of ruling creation alongside her).⁸ Man's "ruling over" woman is a result of the fall, not God's original design and it will not be what it's like in heaven.

Jesus

Every civilization since has lived in the shadow of the fall. Every culture experiences brokenness between men and women. It takes many forms but the results are always the same: the dehumanization of both sexes. Into this reality God sent his Son Jesus as the only solution to humanity's problem. Jesus' substitutionary death and victorious resurrection healed forever the relationship between God the Father and all those who would put their faith in God the Son. This miracle of salvation also works horizontally, as it were, to heal the relationships

¹ The reader is encouraged to refer to the Westminster Confession of Faith for an in-depth view on what we understand the Bible to be <http://epcoga.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/Files/1-Who-We-Are/B-About-The-EPC/WCF-ModernEnglish.pdf>

² Gen. 1:27

³ Gen. 2:20-25

⁴ See Ex. 18:4, Deut. 33:7, Ps. 70:5, Ps. 121:1, Ps. 146:5, Hos. 13:9

⁵ <https://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/women-and-work-in-the-old-testament/god-created-woman-as-an-ezer-kind-of-helper-genesis-218>

⁶ The Apostle Paul speaks of the woman as the guilty party in 1 Tim. 2:13 and of the man as the guilty party in Rom. 5:12. Scripture does not contradict itself. Adam and Eve were a one-flesh union. Both were present at the tree in Eden. Both were culpable for their sin and, subsequently, our fallen nature.

⁷ Gen. 3:6

⁸ Gen. 3:15-16

between human beings. The locus of this reconciliation is, by God's design, his covenant family; the Church. To see what a reconciled relationship between women and men can and should look like, we take our cues from Jesus himself. How did Jesus, the ultimate Elder and male authority figure, treat women? Remarkably, whenever Jesus had the option of reinforcing cultural gender roles that marginalized women or elevating women to equality with men, he chose the latter. The announcement of the birth of Israel's savior was given to a young, unknown woman. Mary was the first person in scripture to profess faith in Jesus.⁹ Most unexpectedly, Matthew's genealogy of Jesus prominently features women, including two victims of rape¹⁰ and a foreign prostitute¹¹. Jesus turned a male-dominated society on its head by including women among his students¹², forgiving a woman caught in adultery¹³, and allowing a 5-time divorcee to serve him before commissioning her to share the good news.¹⁴ Importantly, after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to women at the empty tomb and commissioned them as the first heralds of the gospel, telling them to go and tell the disciples that Jesus was alive. It is stunning he would choose women for this task at a time when the testimony of a woman was inadmissible in court.¹⁵ Jesus repeatedly and radically elevated women, even commissioning them to preach the gospel to men and to the nations.

Paul

Most people who believe women are not to be elders come to this conclusion, in large part, based on a series of passages found in letters written by the Apostle Paul. As noted in our brochure on women in ministry, we believe that when interpreted in their historical/theological contexts and in light of the full biblical witness, we conclude these passages were given for specific reasons and were not meant to be universal.

For instance, Paul tells his student Timothy that he does not allow a woman to teach a man.¹⁶ This was probably Paul's policy in Greek cities because women were culturally restricted there. In Roman cities, where women were culturally accustomed to leading, teaching, and freely engaging in commerce, Paul had quite a different policy, as we will see. Timothy was ministering in the Greek city of Ephesus. It would have been culturally suspect for women to lead a religious movement in that city. In Ephesus (and Corinth too), women were not permitted to own land or represent themselves. Women who were assertive in public spaces were likely assumed to be prostitutes or escorts.¹⁷ If that weren't reason enough to forbid female teachers in Ephesian churches, the city boasted a highly influential cult to the goddess Artemis. Her temple was run by female priests. The prestige of the Temple of Artemis was such that any challenge to its functioning was likely to bring about violent riots in the streets.¹⁸ Paul does not want God's people mixed up with any of that. While the Christian women in Ephesus were

⁹ Lk. 1:39-55

¹⁰ Mt. 1:3, 1:6

¹¹ Mt. 1:5

¹² Lk. 8:1-3, 10:39

¹³ Jn. 8:2-11

¹⁴ Jn. 4:4-41

¹⁵ Mt. 28:1-8, Mk. 16:1-8, Lk. 24:1-10, Jn. 20:1-8

¹⁶ 1 Tim. 2:11-12

¹⁷ See *Apollondorus; Against Naeaera* and the surrounding scholarly debate.

¹⁸ Paul experienced this first hand as recorded in Acts 19:23-41

indeed free in Christ, Paul's counsel to their pastor Timothy is to not let them use that freedom at the expense of the witness of the gospel.¹⁹

To the church in the Greek city of Corinth, Paul says women must be silent in the churches.²⁰ In our view, this too cannot be a universal command because Paul instructs women how to prophesy and pray in church just a few paragraphs earlier in the same letter (with their heads covered, another example of a biblical command we understand to be contextual, not universal).²¹ Paul tells men they must have short hair.²² He tells women to dress modestly, specifically forbidding fancy hair, expensive clothes, gold and pearls.²³ We understand instructions such as these in their historical and cultural context. This is how we understand the limits Paul places on women in ministry as well.²⁴

When the Bible limits the roles women can play, it does so for a particular place and time and for a particular reason. In contrast to the examples given thus far, there are other places where the Apostle Paul celebrates the leadership roles of women. In his concluding remarks to the church in Philippi, Paul indicates he's had a long standing professional relationship with two women, Euodia and Syntyche. He calls them his co-workers.²⁵ Paul concludes his Letter to the Church in Rome commending 7 women according to their roles in ministry. One, Junia, he describes as "outstanding among the apostles", the highest honor in the 1st century church.²⁶ Another, Prisca, we read about in the Book of Acts (there called Priscilla) where she and her husband correct the well-learned preacher Apollos in his doctrine. Paul considers her to be his co-laborer for the gospel.²⁷ Paul converted a well-to-do businesswoman named Lydia and baptized her entire household on the basis of her faith.²⁸ He tells the churches in Galatia and Colossae that in Christ their differences amount to nothing when compared to the unity they now have in Christ. He specifically includes the status differences between men and women in his Letter to the Galatians.²⁹

Conclusion

God is a God of redemption. Though men and women are still so often pitted against one another because of sin, God has shown us abundant grace by forgiving us, engrafting us into his family tree, and remaking us, even now, into the kind of people that will populate the new

¹⁹ Paul asserts this principle directly in Gal. 5:13

²⁰ 1 Cor. 14:34-36

²¹ 1 Cor. 11:2-6

²² 1 Cor. 11:14

²³ 1 Tim. 2:9

²⁴ Winter, Bruce W. *Roman Wives, Roman Widows; The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities*. Eerdmans. pp. xiii-xiv.

²⁵ Phil. 4:2-3

²⁶ Rom. 16:1-16 The ESV's rendering of Rom. 16:7 to say "They are well known to the apostles" is an outlier among English translations. It may reflect a bias on the part of the translators that a female could not have been an apostle. This assumption is an historically new development. The ancient church universally understood Junia to be both a woman and an apostle. John Chrysostom (347-407) stated, "Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle." (In ep. ad Romanos 31.2; PG 60.669-670)

²⁷ Acts 18:24-26

²⁸ Acts 16:13-15

²⁹ Gal. 3:28-29, Col. 3:11

heaven and the new earth. Throughout this process of sanctifying his bride, God has used and continues to use women to teach, preach, evangelize and pastor. Our conclusion, based on the full counsel of God's word, is that it is the ultimate will of God to use men and women, *together*, to bear witness to his glory, care for his creation, and shepherd his people.

Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!

For further reading:

Evangelical Presbyterian Church Position Paper on the Ordination of women: <http://epcoga.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/Files/1-Who-We-Are/B-About-The-EPC/Position-Papers/PositionPaper-OrdinationOfWomen.pdf>

Christians for Biblical Equality, "Men, Women and Biblical Equality": https://www.cbeinternational.org/sites/default/files/english_0.pdf

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