

Men and Women Under God

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Introduction

The roles of women and men in the church and the family is a highly charged topic. Many books have been written and many have produced arguments one way or the other. In western society, it is often considered to be a no brainer - of course women should have the same roles as men. We are often told that women are as good as men at everything, and only a dinosaur would say otherwise. It is also claimed that to say that men and women are different is to promote abuse.

But then, we are also often told that women are better than men at many things, so are they the same, or different?

However, the question we need to answer, is not what does our society say, but what does God tell us to do? We may have strong feelings on this subject, but we need to let our feelings be informed and corrected by God. What are his loving and good instructions to us?

God has spoken to us in his Spirit inspired word, the Bible, so we need to take our views from there.

In the Bible relationships between the sexes are covered in a number of places, in a variety of ways. This set of studies is aimed to work through the verses that are most relevant, or come up most often in discussion on the issue, and try to come to a conclusion as to what the Bible says to us on this important but controversial topic.

As a convenient arrangement of the material, the study generally follows the Biblical order. Obviously, a brief overview like this cannot hope to cover in great detail every objection that may be raised on one side or the other, but it aims to briefly deal with the main arguments as we go through each passage.

The material is divided up into 7 studies, each of which should be able to be covered in a single session if the leader remains focused. It will help to realise that many questions that come up will eventually be covered in later studies, and are best kept till then.

Due to its scope, these studies are a necessarily brief (and some may say shallow) look into the various passages considered. However, due to the magnitude of the consistent message of the Scriptures, I hope you will find that God's purposes will become clear. This series is not aimed at the theologian, it is for those who sit in the pew and want an introduction to the Bible's message on this important topic.

In the Leader's Notes, I have given brief outlines of an answer to each question asked, and occasionally some additional background.

In the Appendix there is a very brief list of material that may be helpful for those who want to look into the topic in more detail.

1 The Scriptures and Creation

1.1 The Scriptures

In this series, we are going to be looking at what the Bible says on this issue. It is good to first work out what type of document the Bible is, and to what extent we can rely on it.

Much of the heat generated on this topic is because ultimately people have different views of the Bible.

Read: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Q1 Are the Scriptures cleverly devised stories?

Q2 How close was Peter's knowledge of Jesus?

Q3 How does Peter describe the "prophetic message", that we also have, in verse 19?

Q4 Is Scripture the prophet's own interpretation of things?

Q5 Whose interpretation is it then?

Read: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Q6 To what degree is Scripture God breathed (inspired)? (verse 16)

Q7 What is Scripture useful for? (verses 15-17)

We see that the Bible was written by human agents, but what they wrote was inspired by the Holy Spirit, it is not their own interpretation, and is completely reliable. This means that books and letters contained in the Bible, though initially written for the original audience, are also God's words for us, written by God to instruct us today. Though it may aid our study, we do not need an in depth understanding of the original situation in order to understand God's instructions to us today.

1.2 Godly Headship

In this series we are going to be talking about headship quite a bit. In order to set in our minds what this looks like, it is good to go to our chief and perfect example – Jesus.

Read: Philippians 2:5-8

Q8 Who is Jesus by nature or form?

Q9 What nature or form did he take on instead?

Q10 How far did he go in his service?

Q11 What does Christlike headship look like?

Jesus modelled servant leadership, giving himself up totally for those whom he served. He did not lord it over others, or abuse them, or do anything to hurt them, but instead he was willing to submit even to the excruciating death of crucifixion for them.

This is the form of leadership or headship that is modelled for us by Jesus, and it is the form of leadership that Christian leaders are to copy, whether in the church or home (Ephesians 5:25-33). We should keep this in mind as we work through the following material.

Clearly, this means that abuse or violence has no part in headship, what is modelled by Jesus is exactly the opposite.

1.3 Creation

1.3.1 Image of God

The first place we turn to is the creation. How did God create the world to operate, back before the Fall, back when it was all still "very good" (Genesis 1:31)?

In these verses, the word variously translated as man, mankind or humankind is "adam" in Hebrew. This is the generic term for mankind, but is later also used as Adam's name, as he is the father of all mankind.

Read: Genesis 1:26-28

Q12 Who is made "in the image of God"?

Being made in the image of God has been seen to mean many things. Some of what it means would include:

1. It was not a physical likeness — but the human body was an appropriate physical vessel for Jesus to use
2. It was a mental likeness — we have the mental capacity to communicate with God and to be creative in our own way
3. It was a moral likeness — we are capable of being holy, capable of knowing right and wrong and being responsible for our decisions
4. It was a social likeness — we are created to be relational, both with each other and with God

Q13 Who is to have dominion (to rule over) creation?

Q14 Who is to be fruitful?

We see that both male and female are made in the image of God. Together they are to have dominion over the creation, to subdue and fill it.

1.3.2 Creation Order

Read: Genesis 2:4-9, 15-24

This is not a second creation story, instead it is zooming in on the sixth day and giving us a more detailed account of what happened on that day.

Q15 Who is made first? Adam or Eve?

We need to figure out whether this is significant, to do that, we can look at whether Paul considers it is.

At this stage, don't worry about the particular argument being put forward by Paul - we will deal with that in a later study, just look at Paul's reason for coming to his conclusion in verse 13.

Read: 1 Timothy 2:11-13

Q16 Does Paul consider that the order of creation is significant?

1.3.3 Naming

Q17 Going back to Genesis 2:15-17, when and to whom did God give his instructions for living in the garden?

Q18 Going to Genesis 2:19-20, who gave the names to all the animals and when? What implications can you draw from this?

Adam giving the names to the animals shows his headship over the animals, consistent with mankind being given dominion over creation in Genesis 1:28.

Q19 Now going to Genesis 2:23, who gave Eve her name? Can you draw any implications from this? Also see Genesis 3:20.

The fact that Adam names Eve does seem to imply some sort of headship over her.

1.3.4 Creation of Eve

Q20 Why does God create Eve (Genesis 2:18)?

This verse implies some sort of difference in roles. Woman was created to be man's helper. This word "helper" is used of God (e.g. Psalm 54:4, Hosea 13:9), so it is not degrading in any way! Note that this was BEFORE the fall, while everything was still "very good".

Q21 Looking at Genesis 2:22-23, how does God create Eve? What does that imply for Adam? What implications can you draw from this?

We need to figure out whether this reason for creating woman is significant, to do that, we can look at whether Paul considers it is.

Again, don't worry about the particular argument being put forward by Paul – we will deal with that in a later study, just look at Paul's reason for coming to his conclusion.

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:3-12

Q22 Does Paul consider the purpose that Eve was created for to be significant?

Paul uses the fact that Eve was made for man, as his helper, to demonstrate that there is an hierarchy of headship – Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. We will look into this further in a later study.

Looking at the detailed creation story in Genesis 2, we see that at the time when God had created the world, when everything was still "very good", there was an order to the relationship between man and woman. Man was in a headship role and woman was created to be his helper as they both worked to achieve the tasks that God had given them to do.

We have seen that the man and woman had different roles, but they were equal. They were equally created in God's image, equally capable of a relationship with God and with each other.

God says that it is not good for man to be alone, but that doesn't mean that we cannot be fulfilled as a single person, even Jesus was single. It means that men, generally, need women in order to fulfil the task they both were given at creation.

1.4 To Finish

Q24 What can we conclude from this study as to how men and women were designed to relate?

2 The Fall

We now turn to what we can tell about their relationship as things went sour.

When God created the world it was described as "very good" (Genesis 1:31), but sadly, things didn't stay that way. Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God. In looking at this account, we can learn further details about their relationship, both before and after they suffered the effects of their disobedience.

2.1 Order of Culpability

Read: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Q1 What was Adam told he should not do in the garden?

Adam was told this before Eve was created out of his side. Presumably he (or God) later told Eve all that God had told him.

Q2 Who does the serpent target when seeking to undermine their relationship with God?

Q3 Where was Adam during this process? (See verse 6)

Q4 What does this imply about who is responsible for what happened?

We don't know how long Adam had been "with her" (verse 6). He may have been there the whole time, or he may have just joined her, but either way, he went along with her in their rebellion against God, expressed by eating the fruit.

Read: Genesis 3:8-19

Q5 Who does God first talk to and hold accountable for their action?

Q6 Why do you think he did that?

Q7 Who does Adam blame for his mistake?

Q8 Who does Eve blame?

Q9 When confronted with our own sin, is this what we do today?

Adam and Eve have now "fallen", they are acting out their sinful selfish attitudes, so Adam blames Eve and God for putting her there, rather than admitting his own sin, and Eve blames the serpent. We all still tend to do this today, and so God has to continually call on us to admit our own sin before God.

Here we see that God holds Adam to account for what they did as a couple, he is the head, and so should have either intervened or not gone along with Eve's sinful action.

2.2 Woman Deceived

Q10 What does Eve say the serpent did to her? (Genesis 3:13)

We need to figure out whether this is significant, to do that, we can look at whether Paul considers it is.

Again, don't worry about the particular argument being put forward by Paul - we will deal with that in a later study, just look at Paul's reason for coming to his conclusion.

Read: 1 Timothy 2:11-15

Q11 Does Paul think that the fact that Eve was deceived is important?

Paul also refers to Eve being deceived in 2 Corinthians 11:3, but this is addressed to all his Corinthian hearers, fearing that they, both male and female, might be deceived, so is not relevant to our present discussion.

We see that the Bible tells us of the differences between men and women, and that this is significant.

2.3 Relations Marred

Adam and Eve are now suffering the fruit of their rebellion against God and his loving instructions. We now look at what effect this has on their relationship.

Read: Genesis 3:16

Q12 What are we told about how Adam and Eve will now relate?

Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's sons. Cain was angry when Abel's offering to God was accepted and his was not.

Read: Genesis 4:6-7

Q13 Are there any similarities between verses 3:16 and 4:7?

Q14 Does this help you understand what God is saying to Eve in 3:16?

Some say that this verse means that Eve will have an over dependence on Adam, and there may be some truth in this. However, the parallel in Genesis 4:7 indicates that her desire may be to work against his role as her head, just as sin works against Cain. This may express itself in a woman being bossy, controlling or manipulative.

For Adam's part, rather than being a loving sacrificial head, he will want to rule over Eve. This is the worldly view of leadership.

2.4 To Finish

Q15 What have you learnt so far about the way that men and women are designed to interrelate?

Q16 What relationships are you in where this might be relevant?

Q17 What could you do to improve those relationships?

3 Mt Sinai to Jesus

3.1 At Mt Sinai

When God brought the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt, he had the unique opportunity to set up a new community, with rules that followed his ideals. He had a clean slate. We read about the rules in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. God wanted his people to be different from the nations around them, so he didn't simply follow the normal standards of the society of that day.

Nehemiah lived about 600BC, around 1000 years after Moses' day.

Read: Nehemiah 9:13

Q1 What was Nehemiah's opinion of the rules that were set up under Moses?

So what did that society look like? We will briefly look at four passages to get a picture.

Read: Exodus 15:19-21

Q2 What role was given to Miriam? What does she do?

Jethro, Moses' father in law then came and looked at what Moses was doing and made some suggestions.

Read: Exodus 18:24-26

Q3 Who were to be judges?

They then went to the foot of Mt Sinai, where God gave Moses instructions on how to set up this new society, and its priesthood.

Read: Exodus 40:12-15

Q4 Who were to be the priests

After 40 years of wandering, the Israelites finally reached the edge of the Promised Land, and Moses reminded them of what he had done.

Read: Deuteronomy 4:5-8

Q5 How are the new laws described, and how are the surrounding nations expected to react?

These verses show that the Lord gave Israel the laws as a witness to the nations as to how wonderful the Lord is. This includes the male leadership that he designed into it. God would not have set up his own nation like that and yet left a major flaw in it.

We see that in this new, good society that God set up, men are designated to be judges and priests, but women also have important and valued roles in that society, one role being that of a prophet. In this case, that of Miriam, someone who doesn't necessarily foretell, but instead leads the people in praise.

We will look in more detail later ([Section 5.3](#)), at what being a prophet involves.

3.2 Women as Prophets

3.2.1 Deborah

One of the objections that is commonly raised to male headship is the example of women who are in obvious leadership positions. One of the women often mentioned is Deborah. Deborah lived during the time of the Judges, before Israel had a king.

Read: Judges 4:1-10; 23-24

Note: It can be difficult to figure out what is going on here, so we must be careful not to put too much weight on this passage, but only use it in conjunction with other passages. It is a good principle when reading the Bible, to always let easy to understand passages help us to understand harder to understand passages, and not to base our theology on the hard ones.

Q6 How is Deborah described?

Q7 Was she good at what she did? Did God use her gifts?

Q8 Why was Barak rebuked by Deborah in verse 9?

Q9 What conclusions can you draw from this incident about the roles of men and women?

Deborah was used by God to lead the people and she was an effective leader. Barak was rebuked, and dishonoured, because he wouldn't lead the army, but wanted Deborah to go with him. This best seems to make sense if we see that Barak was supposed to fulfil his role as a man, but wanted a woman to help him. In response, God ensured that it was a woman who killed the Canaanite commander to shame Barak, who should have done this task.

It seems that when men won't do their job, God will use women instead, and they can be very effective.

3.2.2 Huldah

Huldah is a not so well known prophet. Under Godly King Josiah, a neglected Book of the Law (possibly Deuteronomy) had been found.

Read: 2 Kings 22:8-20

Q10 Who did Hilkiah visit in order to “inquire of the Lord”?

Not long after this, the Babylonians invaded Judah and took the leaders and many of the people into exile.

Q11 Did Huldah’s prophecy come true? Was she a true prophet of God?

Again we see God using a woman as his prophet.

3.3 Strong Women

We can get a good view of the role of women in Old Testament times, and the types of things they got involved in, through the description of a woman that we have in Proverbs 31.

Note: Gates were the centre of civic and economic life in an Israelite city, where the leading men gathered.

Read: Proverbs 31:10-31

This is obviously a picture of an ideal woman, which no one could hope to live up to, but we can still learn from her.

Q12 What do we learn about ancient women here?

The picture we have here of an ancient woman can go against many of our expectations. She is industrious, makes decisions and is involved in commerce outside the home. She cares for her family and the poor. She is more concerned with her relationship with God than her outward beauty. In short, this woman is a strong, active, independent, capable and Godly figure. She sets a high bar for women of today who might try to emulate her!

3.4 Jesus

As we look at this topic, it is of course critical that we investigate Jesus' attitude to women. First off, it is instructive to look at the way he interacted with the expectations of the people of the day.

The Pharisees were religious leaders among the Jews who generally didn't like what Jesus said. The Herodians were not so worried about religion but more concerned with political power and keeping on the good side of their overlords the Romans. In this reading, they think they have come up with a question that will cause Jesus to offend either one group or the other.

Read: Matthew 22:15-22

Q13 In verse 16, what is their assessment of Jesus attitude to the norms of the day?

Jesus' answer in fact doesn't please either group, but also doesn't give them any grounds to condemn him.

We see in this incident, and elsewhere, that Jesus is not worried about the attitudes of the people, even his enemies acknowledge that. Instead, he has come to turn them back to God and to challenge their expectations.

3.4.1 Jesus and women

We can now turn to Jesus and his interactions with women.

Note: Many first century Jews felt that women were intellectually inferior and incapable of studying the Bible.

3.4.1.1 Travelling Companions

Read: Luke 8:1-3

Q14 What are the women doing in this passage?

3.4.1.2 Mary and Martha

Read: Luke 10:38-42

Q15 What does Martha think Mary should be doing when Jesus is visiting them?

Q16 What does Jesus think that Mary should be doing?

Jesus' attitude to Mary is that she can sit at his feet and learn just like the other (male) disciples.

3.4.1.3 Woman at the well

Read: John 4:7-10, 27-30, 39-42

Q17 Why was the woman surprised? (verse 9)

Q18 Why are the disciples surprised? (verse 27)

Q19 What was the effect of the woman talking to the towns people?

Q20 What was the ultimate effect of the woman's drawing the people to Jesus?

Jesus interacts with the woman in a culturally unexpected way, drinking from her cup and talking to her about spiritual things. She in her turn is an effective evangelist, convincing some by her own testimony, and bringing others to Jesus where many others believed.

3.4.1.4 *Mary at the tomb*

Jesus has been crucified and the disciples are in disarray. On the first day of the week, Mary and some of the other women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.

In Jesus day, women were considered to be unreliable witnesses.

Read: John 20:10-18

Q21 What was Mary's role in the announcement that Jesus had risen from the dead?

Jesus had a counter culturally high view of women, treating them with great respect and, despite the cultural norms, he considered them worthy of receiving teaching and being able to interact intelligently on theological issues. He used them as effective evangelists and they were also the first witnesses to his resurrection.

3.4.2 Choosing Disciples

Read: Matthew 9:9-13

Q22 What profession did Matthew follow?

Q23 What was the opinion of the Pharisees of such people?

Q24 Was Jesus worried about people's opinions or cultural norms?

Read: Matthew 10:1-4

Q25 Who does Jesus choose as his disciples, later called apostles?

We have seen previously that Jesus wasn't concerned about the norms of the day, and as we see here, he was happy to do things like choose tax collectors as disciples. Given this background, it seems unlikely that he would choose men and not women as his future leaders on the basis of cultural norms. Jesus must have chosen men because it was right to put only men in leadership positions among his followers.

3.5 To Finish

Q26 What have you learnt from this study about how women are viewed in the Bible?

Q27 How has this changed your view of what roles women should be involved in?

4 Roles in the family

4.1 Ephesians

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul tells the Ephesians that they should be wise in how they live as God's holy people. In this context he gives some instructions concerning various relationships.

Read: Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1, 4, 5, 9

In verse 21, we are told that we should "submit to one another", and then in verses 5:25-6:9. Paul gives us examples of what that submission looks like.

Q1 In these examples, do we see two people submitting to one another as equals, or one person submitting to another person because of their different roles?

We see that in verse 21, Paul is not saying that all Christians should submit to all other Christians. He is saying that someone who is in a subordinate role should submit to those who are in a leadership role. He then proceeds to give examples of that: wives submitting to husbands; children to parents; and slaves to masters.

Q2 The relationship between a husband and a wife is compared to what other relationship in these verses?

These verses give us a wonderful parallel between the relationship between a man and his wife, and Jesus and his church. Paul marvels in verses 29-32 that the church becomes "one flesh" with Jesus, in the same way that a husband and wife become "one flesh". The earthly marriage is a symbol for us of the reality of the heavenly marriage, and that heavenly marriage gives us the perfect example of how husbands and wives should relate.

Q3 In verses 22 to 33, who is to submit to who?

Q4 In what situations should a wife submit to her husband (verse 24)?

Q5 How is a husband to relate to his wife in verse 25?

Q6 What example is the husband to follow in his headship?

Q7 How far did Jesus go in his servant leadership of the church?

Q8 How far should a husband go in his servant leadership of his wife?

These verses give us a wonderful model for wives and husbands to follow: as the church submits to Jesus, so wives should submit to their husbands; and as Jesus sacrificed himself for his church, looking out for her needs before his own, so a husband is to sacrifice himself for his wife.

4.2 Colossians

One principle of good Bible reading is to see whether our understanding of one passage is backed up by other portions of Scripture.

Read: Colossians 3:17-19

Q9 Does this passage support or modify the understanding you gained from Ephesians 5?

4.3 1 Peter

Unlike the letters to the churches at Ephesus and Colossae which were written by Paul, this letter is written by the Apostle Peter. It is good to see whether it is only Paul who promotes the particular view of relationships within marriage that we have just read about.

Read: 1 Peter 3:1-7

Q10 Does this passage support or modify the understanding you gained from Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3?

Q11 Should Christian women only submit to their husbands if they are Christians?

Q12 Why should they do this?

Q13 What example does Sarah give women of today (verse 6)?

Q14 How should husbands treat their wives (verse 7)?

Q15 Why does Peter give them this instruction – what might be the result if they do not follow what Peter says?

Peter's model for family relations is the same as Paul's. Some try to portray Paul as a "woman hater", but we see that Peter is of the same mind.

The model of relationships that we have seen are what was originally intended for Adam and Eve. However, as we saw when we looked at Genesis 3, we find it impossible to follow these instructions because of our sinfulness. Genesis 3:16b tells us that women will not want to submit to their husbands, and husbands will not want to practice servant leadership of their wives, but will instead want to rule over them.

In spite of our sinfulness, the Biblical model is still the model that Christian husbands and wives should seek to follow in their relationships.

This will be completely misunderstood by the society around us who have few good role models. However, as we follow God's ways, we will show the wisdom of God to the people around us. As we saw in Study 2, this will be in the same way that his laws given to Israel at Mount Sinai through Moses were supposed to show God's wisdom to the surrounding nations.

In these passages, we see that it is up to wives to voluntarily submit to their husbands, and for husbands to sacrifice themselves for their wives. There is no compulsion here. There is no justification for a husband to attempt to make his wife submit to him.

4.4 1 Corinthians

In this section of Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, Paul is answering questions that they have asked him in a letter he has received.

Read: 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

Q16 In verses 3-6, should married couples have sex?

Q17 How should it be determined how often they should have sex and who should decide?

Q18 Who's sexual needs should the husband be concentrating on?

Q19 Who's sexual needs should the wife be concentrating on?

Q20 In verse 10-16, who may decide whether to divorce?

Q21 What is the overriding consideration in deciding whether to separate (verse 16)?

Paul says that sexual relationships are by mutual agreement as an act of mutual service, and he goes on to talk to both wives and husbands about divorce in very egalitarian terms. This was unheard of in Jewish society in that time. Christians should not seek to separate from their non Christian spouses as they may be able to play a part in them becoming Christians, and also for the sake of their children (verse 14).

In this study, we have seen that in the Biblical view of marriage, wives should submit to their husbands and husbands should sacrificially serve their wives, modelling their relationship on the relationship between Jesus and the sanctified church.

We also see that Paul is counter cultural in his instructions concerning sex in marriage and divorce. Paul sees that sex in marriage is good and that the husband and the wife are to look after the needs of their partners before their own needs.

We have been given a very broad principle here. How this will work out in practice in a marriage will depend on the husband and wife and their own situation, gifts and abilities.

4.5 To Finish

Q22 How do you think that Paul's view of how relationships should work in marriage would be described in the secular media?

Q23 Why do you think that God ordained that the marriage relationship should work this way?

Q24 Are you convinced that this is the right way for husbands and wives to relate?

Q25 If you are married, how does your marriage measure up against God's standards?

God is the one who designed and created us. He knew what he was doing when the Holy Spirit inspired Paul and Peter to write on this topic. God's ways are designed for human flourishing, but it can be difficult for us, as sinful people, to live out his ways in practice.

Thankfully we can continually bring our failings to God, asking for his forgiveness in Christ, and asking for him to help us better follow his ways in the future.

5 Roles in the Church 1

5.1 Why different roles

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 and Ephesians 4:15-16

Q1 Why has God given people different roles in the church?

5.2 Co-Workers

It is good to start off by looking at how Paul viewed the women he worked with.

Read: Philippians 4:2-3

These two ladies are having a dispute and Paul is asking an unknown third individual to intervene.

Q2 In verse 3, what does Paul say these women have done, and how does he describe them?

5.3 Prophets and Teachers

In looking at roles in the church we first need to look at some of those roles and work out what they are from a Biblical perspective.

Much confusion is caused by our lack of understanding of prophecy, what it is, what it is not, and how Old Testament prophecy relates to prophecy in New Testament times. It is outside the scope of this study to look at this in detail, but we will look at broad principals.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul is writing to a church that had got roles and gifts all muddled up.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Q3 What roles or gifts does Paul tell us have been appointed by God

Q4 For Paul, is prophecy the same as teaching?

In this section, Moses is telling the people what will they should do as they enter the Promised Land.

Read: Deuteronomy 18:17-22

Q5 What should happen to a false prophet?

Q6 How can they tell whether a prophet is speaking words from the Lord?

In the Old Testament, many people are referred to as prophets, and various forms of communication are referred to as prophecy, not all of it fore-telling the future. E.g. Miriam as a prophet led the people in praise (Ex 15:20-21).

Moses sees that God will raise up prophets who will replace him. These prophets are to be treated with great care, they are to be listened to and obeyed. There are great consequences if this does not happen, both for disobedient hearers (verse 19) and for false prophets (verse 20).

Read: 1 Corinthians 14:29-32

Q7 How many prophecies should be heard?

Q8 When a prophet speaks, what should "others" do?

Q9 If another person has a revelation (prophecy), what should the first prophet do?

Paul uses the terms prophecy and revelation interchangeably.

Q10 Is this different to how we saw prophecies were to be treated in Deuteronomy?

In this situation, prophecies are to be under control, to be limited in time and number, and are to be weighed on the spot. This is very different to prophecies in Old Testament times.

A number of the Old Testament prophets were inspired by God to give us the Scriptures. In contrast, the New Testament was delivered to us through the Apostles and their mouthpieces (2 Peter 3:2). Now that the time of the Apostles has ended, there is no longer a need for Scripture writing (Hebrews 1:1-2), and so the role of prophets is greatly reduced.

So, what does New Testament style prophecy involve?

Read: 1 Corinthians 14:3-5, 24-26, 31

Q11 What do the words of the prophet achieve in verse 3?

Q12 Who does the prophet edify (build up) in verse 4?

Q13 What happens to an unbeliever as a result of hearing prophecy in verse 24?

Q14 What will be the result for the unbeliever in verse 25?

Q15 How does Paul summarise what prophecy achieves in verse 31?

We have seen that prophecy is given by God to strengthen, encourage and build up the church. It will convict unbelievers of sin and result in them worshipping God.

It does not necessarily involve fore telling (predicting the future), but it is a revelation, or we might say an insight, that God has given to the prophet.

We saw earlier that teaching is different to prophesying. So we now turn to asking what teaching involves.

Read: Titus 2:1-15

Q16 What does Paul tell Titus about his teaching in these verses?

Read: 2 Timothy 4:2

Q17 What does Paul tell Timothy his preaching and teaching (instruction) should include?

Paul sees teaching as including correction and rebuke, along with encouragement.

From the way he uses the terms in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, we can see that Paul uses the terms message or word of knowledge and teaching interchangeably. Presumably this is related to knowledge of the Scriptures and the Gospel.

So how does prophecy differ from teaching?

We have seen that they have many things in common, for instance, both involve encouragement. However, teaching uniquely involves correction and rebuking and it includes the passing on of sound doctrine. It requires a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and the Gospel.

As we saw in 1 Corinthians 14:29-32, prophecy is also to be weighed and is subject to the control of other prophets. We have no equivalent command for teachers.

5.4 Who may prophesy and where?

Given this knowledge of the terms, we need to find out whether there is any difference between men and women in how they are to practice these gifts in a Godly fashion.

In this passage, Luke is telling us of his journey with Paul to Jerusalem.

Read: Acts 21:7-9

Q18 Who are described as prophets here?

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:4-5

Q19 Who are described as doing what here, and where are they doing it? Don't worry about the references to "head" here as we will deal with that in the next study.

As we have seen in the Old Testament, there isn't any restriction for women to be prophets in the New Testament and they may do so in the church context. We also see that there is no restriction on them praying in that context either.

5.5 Who may teach whom?

Having looked at prophecy, we now turn to teaching. In these passages, Paul is telling his helpers, Titus and Timothy, what they should do in their ministry and setting up of churches.

Read: Titus 2:3-5

Q20 Who should teach who here? Who should they be teaching?

Read: 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15

Q21 Who taught Timothy as a child and are commended for it?

Read: 1 Timothy 2:11-14

Q22 Who should a woman not teach or have authority over?

Q23 In what manner should a woman learn?

Note that, as we have seen before, Paul says that women should learn, which was a counter-cultural idea. However, as they learn, they should not seek to work against the man's role of teaching, but instead they should be act in a way that indicates their acceptance of it.

Q24 What reason is given in verse 13?

Q25 What reason is given in verse 14?

The first reason given by Paul is based on the way that God created men and women to relate to each other. As we saw in our first study, this was before they sinned, while the creation could still be described as “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

The second reason relates to differences in the way Eve and Adam related to Satan and his deception.

Neither of these reasons are cultural in nature, and so are applicable for all time. While it is true that we see from 1 Tim 5:13 that some Ephesian women were good talkers, it is not suggested there that they did that in their church meetings.

As we have seen before, this is profoundly counter cultural. Our society screams at us that women are just as good as men in everything, so they should be able to do everything a man does. The question here is not about women’s ability. If Paul meant that women are incapable of teaching, then he wouldn’t have instructed women to teach other women and children and he wouldn’t have commended Lois and Eunice. The question here is about the order that God has designed into how men and women should relate in the church.

We see in this study that in the church context, women are encouraged to learn, to pray and prophecy in mixed groups, and to teach other women and children. However, they shouldn’t teach men or have authority over them. If men are to lead their wives in the home, then this makes sense – what happens in church should be consistent with what happens in the home.

Read: Acts 18:24-26

Q26 Who is being taught by who here?

Q27 In what context was it occurring?

5.6 To Finish

Q28 Who does the prophesying in your church? Does it happen?

Q29 Who does the teaching in your church? Does it include correction and rebuke?

Q30 Do you, or your church need encouragement or correction and rebuke on this issue?

6 Roles in the Church 2

The word used in the original Greek for men "*aner*" (or "*andros*"), can mean either a man or a husband, and the Greek word for women "*gune*", can mean either a woman or a wife. What is meant has to be determined by context, which can be a source of confusion.

For this reason, some Bible translations refer to a husband and wife in this passage, others to a man and woman. This problem will also occur in other passages in this study.

6.1 Headship

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Q1 Who is the head of Christ (verse 3)?

Q2 Who is the head of man (verse 3)?

Q3 Who is the head of woman (verse 3)?

Q4 What is a woman doing if she does not cover her head when praying?

Q5 What is the purpose of the woman's head covering (verse 10)?

Q6 Does a head covering have this symbolism in our society?

Q7 Is there some other symbolism relating to the differences of men and women used in our society that it might be good to preserve?

Q8 Is Paul referring to what should happen in the church here? If so, what is the woman doing in the church in verse 5?

In this passage, Paul tells us that there is an order in the relationship between man and woman as there is in the Trinity. This order is still relevant because it is the way men and women were

created to relate to each other (verses 8-9), as we saw in Study 1. This order should continue to be expressed in culturally applicable ways.

It is likely that Paul is referring to women prophesying and praying in a church context.

6.2 Church Leadership Roles

We are now going to look at the leadership roles in the churches that Paul and his helpers planted. These may or may not have any correspondence to the leadership roles in your church, even if the same terms are used.

Read: Philippians 1:1

Q9 What roles does Paul identify in the church at Philippi?

We will now look at these roles in more detail.

6.2.1 Overseers / Elders

Paul seems to use the term *overseer* interchangeably with the term *elder*. It has been suggested that *elder* describes what they are (they are old), whereas *overseer* describes their role.

The term *overseer* has been traditionally translated as *bishop*. In Greek it is the word *episcopos*, from which we get the English word *episcopal* and the *Episcopal* system of church government that emphasises the role of *Bishops*.

The word *elder* in Greek is *presbuteros*, from which we get the English word *Presbyter* and the *Presbyterian* system of church government that emphasises the role of *Elders*.

In Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, he gives them instructions on how to set up the churches they had planted.

Read: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

Q10 What must the overseer be able to **do**, as opposed to what he is to be like, in verses 2 and 3?

Q11 What other role does he have in the church in verses 4 and 5?

Read: 1 Timothy 2:12

Q12 What is a woman **not** permitted to **do** in a church?

Q13 Given your answers to Q9 and Q11, does the role of overseer appear to be reserved for only one sex?

Read: 1 Timothy 5:17

Paul, having used the word *overseer* earlier in the letter now swaps to *elder*.

Q14 What tasks do the elders perform? Do all elders equally perform the same tasks?

Read: Titus 1:5-9

Paul uses the term *elder* in verse 5 and *overseer* in verse 7.

He seems to be using the terms interchangeably, emphasising that they need to be blameless (above reproach) - the word appears in both verse 6 and verse 7.

Q15 Does the role of elder appear to be reserved for only one sex?

Q16 What task does he perform in verse 7?

Q17 What tasks does he perform in verse 9?

We have seen that an overseer or elder must be a man of exemplary character who is able to manage the church. They must also be able to preach, teach and rebuke.

6.2.2 Deacons

This reading is from when Jesus had recently returned to heaven and the Apostles were trying to figure out how best to run the fledgling church in Jerusalem.

Read: Acts 6:1-6

Q18 How did the twelve Apostles decide to solve their problem?

Q19 What did that allow the Apostles to concentrate on?

Q20 Were both men and women chosen by the church for this role?

These seven men are considered to be the first deacons. The word's origin is someone who gets their "hands dirty". They are people who do the practical service to allow the Apostles (and later the Elders / Overseers) to concentrate on their particular role. Often this word is simply translated as servant or using other terms, so it may not be obvious where it occurs in your Bible version.

Read: Romans 16:1-2

Q21 How is Phoebe described?

This may indicate that women can be deacons.

Our next reading may add to our understanding of this question. As we have just seen, Paul has previously been talking about the role of overseer.

Read: 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Q22 What are the qualifications for a deacon (verses 8-10, 12)?

There has been much discussion on how to interpret verse 11. The question is whether Paul is referring to the wives of deacons, or is referring to women who are deacons. Your bible translation may have notes giving the alternative reading. It seems strange that Paul would specify the requirements for the wives of deacons, but not the wives of elders, so in context, and coupled with Romans 16:1-2 that we have just read, it seems highly likely that he is talking about women who are deacons. For the purposes of this study, we will assume it refers to women deacons.

Q23 What are the qualifications for a woman deacon (verse 11)?

In these readings, we have seen that men should be elders / overseers, with the role of managing the church and preaching, teaching and rebuking. This is consistent with the role of the teacher that we saw in the previous study. We have also seen that it is highly likely that women can join men in being deacons – getting their hands dirty in service. This helps to ensure that the (exclusively male) elders can concentrate on their roles (as we saw in Acts 6).

The question arises of where Paul, Titus and Timothy fit into all this. It may be that they are fulfilling the role that some denominations refer to as *bishops*, and others as *apostles*, having a regional responsibility (e.g. see 1 Timothy 5:19-21 where they rebuke elders and Titus 1:5 and Acts 14:23 where they appoint elders). We may then even consider referring to Paul as an *archbishop*!

6.3 Weighing Prophecy

The interpretation of the passage we are about to study is often disputed, but we can learn some definite lessons from it.

Read: 1 Corinthians 14:26-38

Q24 In verse 28, what is the tongue speaker to do if there is no interpreter present?

Q25 In verse 30, what is a prophet to do if a revelation comes to another prophet?

Q26 What are women to do in verse 34 to 35.

What Paul says to women is no different to what he says to other groups depending on the circumstances. When appropriate, all should remain silent and let the those whose position it is to speak do so. This is so that all may be done in an orderly fashion (verse 33).

Q27 In verse 29, what are the “others” to do when a prophet speaks?

One commonly held view of verses 34 to 35 are that they are written in this context of weighing prophecy. We have seen in a previous study that Paul does not forbid women prophesying in the church, but he may be forbidding them being involved in the weighing of prophecy. These verses may also simply be referring to women teaching, which is consistent with what we have seen previously.

Whatever the answer, we can say that there are some situations where women should be quiet in church where men do not have that restriction.

6.4 To Finish

Q28 If a married woman was an elder or overseer in a church, how would that aid or hinder the relationship between her and her husband? Take into account Paul and Peter’s instructions on how husbands and wives should relate that we looked at in Study 4.

Q29 Are the appropriate cultural distinctions between men and women maintained in your church? If so, how?

Q30 Are women in your church performing the role of elders / overseers?

Q31 Are women in your church fulfilling the role of deacons, either formally or informally?

7 How should men and women then live?

This study looks at various passages that deal with the ministry of men and women that have not been looked at previously.

7.1 Commendations

Read: Romans 16:3-15

Q1 Identify each of the people mentioned here and the role they have played in the life of the church and in Paul's life.

Q2 How does Paul view the women in this list?

Q3 Does this give you some ideas of how you might be able to serve, as a single person, or as a couple, for those who are married?

Paul lists various women, men and couples here. All are highly valued by Paul, and he sees them as having had a major role in the spread of the gospel.

7.2 Lifting Hands

Read: 1 Timothy 2:8

Q4 What are men exhorted to do?

Read: 1 Timothy 2:9-10

Q5 What are women exhorted to do? Is this answer different than the answer to the previous question? If so, why do you think that is?

7.3 Notes to a Young Elder

Read: 1 Timothy 5:1-2

Timothy is a younger man, but he is also an elder. His special role of rebuking older men would be reserved for those who have a similar role in the church.

Q6 How should men treat other men?

Q7 How should men treat older women?

Q8 How should men treat younger women?

In this next passage, it seems likely that there was a list of widows who were being provided for by the church, as we saw in Acts 6.

Read: 1 Timothy 5:3-16

Q9 What should widows be doing (verses 3-8)?

Q10 What does Paul expect older widows would have been doing in the past (verses 9-10)?

Q11 What does Paul suggest younger widows should do (verses 11-15)?

Q12 What should women do about widows in their families (verse 16)? What implications might this have for their husbands?

7.4 What teaching to receive

Read: Titus 2:1-6

Q13 What should older men do (verse 2)?

Q14 What should older women do (verses 3-5)?

Q15 What should younger women do (verses 4-5)?

Q16 What should younger men do (verse 6)?

Q17 Is there a group of people who Titus is not instructed to teach? Who are they, and who is to teach them?

Q18 Why do you think Paul give Timothy different instructions for men and women and young and old?

7.5 *Wives and husbands*

Read: 1 Peter 3:1-7

Q19 What should wives do (verses 1-6)?

Q20 What should they do if their husbands are not believers?

Q21 How should husbands treat their wives (verse 7)?

Read: Numbers 30:9-15

Q22 Are these instructions applicable today? To the extent that they are, how might these instructions work themselves out in a marriage today?

7.6 *All Equal*

Read: Galatians 3:26-29

Q23 Who are children of God, Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise?

Q24 Do earthly roles, gender or ancestry make any difference to this?

This passage is often quoted to support the idea that men and women should be treated absolutely identically. As far as their relationship with the Father through the Son, they are identical, but we have also seen that they have different roles in the family and the church. This does not affect their

standing before Christ. The role of men and women is not Paul's focus here. There is a very similar passage in Colossians 3:11, where he doesn't even mention the issue.

7.7 To Finish

Q25 In these passages, Paul gives lists of what men and women should be taught, dependent on their age. He also gives lists of what men and women should do or be like. Why does he give different lists for men versus women?

Q26 Is it significant that Paul's Pastoral Epistles (letters) are addressed to men (Timothy and Titus), and not to women? Is it significant that all the books in the New Testament are written by men (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit)?

Q27 If young men should treat young women as sisters, where does dating fit into how they should relate to each other?

Q28 What do you think of the view of women presented in the Bible?

Q29 Do men and women have a different status or value before God?

Q30 Are you fulfilling your God given role in the church? Are there areas where you need to step up, or where you are acting inappropriately?

Q31 Are you fulfilling your God given role in the family? Are there areas where you need to step up, or where you are acting inappropriately?

Leader's Notes

These notes give brief answers to most of the questions that deal directly with what we can learn from the Scriptures we are studying.

1 The Scriptures and Creation

1.1 *The Scriptures*

According to Peter, the accounts that he and his associates gave of Jesus were by eyewitnesses, and are completely reliable. He also tells us that the prophecies in Scripture are not the result of a prophet's own interpretation, but they were speaking from God.

Paul tells us in his letter to Timothy that all Scripture is breathed out (inspired) by God. It can lead us to salvation and make us thoroughly equipped for all manner of ministry.

This leads us to the question of the clarity and sufficiency of Scriptures.

We don't live in a vacuum, we are blessed with a vast resource of how other Christians have understood the Bible, and we must interact with that, but the Scriptures are designed to be readily understood by those who care to study it, without needing a lot of external knowledge. It can add depth to our understanding to know the background, but it isn't mandatory. As Paul says, the Scriptures can thoroughly equip us for ministry.

The Scriptures are applicable to us here today, wherever we live, otherwise, why did God through his Holy Spirit cause them to be included in the Canon of Scripture so we could read them today?

Some will claim that because we don't know the exact historical background of say, Paul's letter to Timothy, then we can reinterpret or ignore what he says there. But the whole of the Bible is what the divine author, the Holy Spirit, wants to say to us, and we need to listen to it and live by it.

1.2 *Godly Headship*

Jesus is our perfect model of headship. Being God, he took on the form of a human servant, even being willing to die on a cross for those whom he was leading. Christlike headship means a total giving of oneself in the service of others. It has nothing to do with being domineering or abusive or being self-serving.

1.3 *Creation*

1.3.1 Image of God

Mankind, both male and female, are made in God's image. Together they are to have dominion over creation, and are to be fruitful.

1.3.2 Creation Order

Adam was made first, Paul considers this highly significant. It gives Adam (man), a priority, a symbolic reason for his headship.

1.3.3 Naming

The instructions were given to Adam before Eve was created. So, Adam named the animals before Eve was created. Adam is showing his dominion over the animals. Adam then gave Eve her name, showing he has headship over her.

1.3.4 Creation of Eve

God creates Eve because no animal was a suitable helper for Adam. She was made out of Adam's side. She is Adam's equal, made of the same stuff as Adam. Paul considers the purpose for which Eve was created to be significant, she is to be alongside Adam as they both fulfil their mandate. We can conclude that man is the head of woman and that is basic to how we were created, but both men and women need to work together under God.

2 The Fall

2.1 Order of culpability

Adam was told that he should not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent targeted Eve, but it seems that Adam was "with her". This implies that Eve initially, but ultimately, both of them, are responsible for what happened.

God first talks to Adam and holds him accountable for their action. This was because he was Eve's head, and was ultimately responsible for their decisions as a couple. Adam in turn blames both God and Eve for his mistake. Eve then blames the serpent. When confronted with our own sin today, we are exactly the same, we follow in Adam and Eve's footsteps and blame other people.

2.2 Woman deceived

Eve says that the serpent deceived her. Paul considers this to be significant.

2.3 Relations marred

Eve's desire will be for Adam and he will rule over her.

The same words "desire" and "rule" (or master) are used in these two verses.

3 Mt Sinai to Jesus

3.1.1 At Mt Sinai

Nehemiah considered the rules to be just and right and good.

Miriam is a prophet, so this is a role that women can have. In this case she leads them in singing praises to God. This may not be what you expect a prophet to be doing. See 1 Chr 16:41-42; 25:1-8; 35:15 for more on this.

Only men were to be appointed as judges. Only men were to be appointed as priests and then only their sons followed on.

The laws are seen to be good and righteous. The other nations will see the Israelites as being wise and understanding, and see the excellence of their God.

3.2 Women as Prophets

3.2.1 Deborah

Deborah is described as a prophet who was leading Israel. Barak was rebuked by Deborah in verse 9 because he wouldn't lead the Israelite army on his own, he wanted Deborah to go with him. Again, we see that women can serve as prophets. However, Barak was expected to lead in warfare and was dishonoured because he didn't take on the role expected of him.

3.2.2 Huldah

Hilkiah visited Huldah the prophet. Huldah's prophecy came true and so we see that she was a true prophet of God.

3.3 Strong Women

Ancient women are pictured here as being strong and very capable. She is not down trodden, but instead takes a very active role in society. However, she is more concerned with home and family, whereas her husband takes a role in the civic life of the town which was centred on the city gate.

3.4 Jesus

The disciples of the Pharisees recognise that Jesus was not worried about what people say, he just spoke the truth. Some people say that the gender roles that are described in the Bible are just because of the expectations of the times, but Jesus was setting standards for all time, he wasn't worried what the religious or civil leaders thought of what he said.

3.4.1 Jesus and women

In addition to the verses studied below, you may also like to look at Mark 7:24-30 (the Syrophenician woman) and Mark 5:25-34 (the woman suffering from a haemorrhage) and think about Jesus' attitude to these women.

3.4.1.1 Travelling Companions

These women were travelling with Jesus and his disciples and providing for them. Possibly they also provided testimony of what Jesus had done for them.

3.4.1.2 Mary and Martha

Martha thinks that Mary should be helping her with the preparations. However, Jesus says that Mary should be learning from Jesus. This was a counter cultural view of the capabilities and worth of women.

3.4.1.3 Woman at the well

The woman was surprised because Jesus was talking to her, even though she was a Samaritan and a woman. The woman's account caused the townspeople to come out and find out more about Jesus. The ultimate effect was that many became believers. This woman was valued by Jesus and proved to be an effective evangelist.

3.4.1.4 Mary at the tomb

Mary was given the role of being the first to announce to the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. That women were included as the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection from the dead again shows how important they were to Jesus.

3.4.2 Choosing Disciples

Matthew was a tax collector. The Pharisees saw them as sinners, people that religious people did not associate with. Again we see that Jesus wasn't worried about people's opinions or cultural norms. Despite this, Jesus chose 12 men as his disciples. There were a number of women who were significant amongst Jesus' followers, and Jesus considered women to be capable, but he still only chose men as his chief disciples who were then to become his Apostles and the foundation of the church under the New Covenant.

4 Roles in the family

4.1 Ephesians

In these verses, we do not see two people submitting to one another as equals, instead we see one person submitting to another person because of their different roles.

The relationship between a husband and a wife is compared to the relationship between Jesus and the church. This is an illustration full of deep significance.

A wife is to submit to her husband and respect him in everything. A husband is to love his wife and give himself up for her, using the example of Jesus who gave himself up for the church. This is not a symmetrical relationship.

4.2 Colossians

Using our understanding gained from Colossians, we see that it supports our conclusions from Ephesians 5. This gives us confidence that we are on the right track.

4.3 1 Peter

Many consider Paul to be a misogynist, however Peter's letter supports our conclusions gained from Paul's letters.

We even see that Christian women should submit to non-Christian husbands. They should do this so that their unbelieving husbands might turn to Christ.

Sarah obeyed her husband Abraham as her master. This is a difficult idea for today's woman to accept, but it is the example that Peter gives us for today.

Husbands should treat their wives considerately and treat them with respect, as equal heirs, so that their prayers may not be hindered.

4.4 1 Corinthians

In this section, Paul is very balanced in assuming that both husband and wife will be involved in making decisions affecting their relationship.

Married couples should not abstain from sex in order to ensure that both their needs are met. They should together decide together how often they should have sex. The husband should be concentrating on his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should be concentrating on her husband's sexual needs.

Both the husband and the wife are in the position to decide about whether to divorce, but the overriding consideration in deciding whether to separate is the children's relationship with God, and the possible salvation of an unbelieving spouse.

We are not given a straight jacket in the Bible, we are given good principles through which a couple can ensure that they have the best marriage possible.

5 Roles in the Church 1

5.1 Why different roles

God has given people different roles so that together, as a body, it may build itself up in love for the common good. As we shall see, this includes both men and women.

5.2 Co-workers

Euodia and Syntyche have been working at Paul's side in gospel ministry and are described as Paul's co-workers. Women aren't just an unimportant side issue, but instead have an important role to play in completing the church's gospel ministry.

5.3 Prophets and Teachers

Paul tells us that Apostles, Prophets, Teachers, Miracle Workers etc. have been appointed by God. For Paul, prophecy is not the same as teaching.

We are told in Deuteronomy that false prophets should be put to death. They could tell whether a prophet is speaking words from the Lord by whether their predictions came true.

Two or three prophecies should be heard and the “others” should weigh what is said. If another person has a revelation (prophecy), the first prophet should stop speaking.

This is different to how we see prophecies being treated in the Old Testament.

Paul tells us that New Testament style prophecy involves strengthening, encouraging and comfort. It builds up the church. Also an unbeliever will be convicted of sin (reproved), and brought under judgement (called to account) and will thus fall down and worship God.

New Testament prophecy still includes fore-telling, e.g. Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10-11).

In summary, prophecy will result in people being instructed and encouraged.

Paul tells Titus that his teaching should be in accord with sound doctrine, and it will include encouragement and rebuke. He tells Timothy that his preaching and teaching (instruction) should include correcting, rebuking and encouraging.

For more on what teaching involves, see 1 Timothy 4:1-11.

Teachers should be wary as they will be judged by God (James 3:1)

5.4 Who may prophesy and where?

Four women are described as prophets. In Corinth, both men and women are praying and prophesying in the church gathering.

5.5 Who may teach whom?

Titus is to teach older women to teach younger women. Lois and Eunice, his grandmother and mother, taught Timothy as a child and are commended for it.

A woman is not to teach or have authority over a man, they should learn in quietness and full submission.

The reasons given are firstly because Adam was formed first and secondly because Eve was deceived and Adam was not. Neither of these answers are related to the situation in Ephesus. It may be helpful to refer to the conclusions we reached in Section 1.1 — the Scriptures are both clear and sufficient. This includes the pastoral letters. They are given to us so that we may be taught and rebuked and corrected and trained and be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For example, we should be wary of denying the clear teaching of Scripture just because of some “new understanding” of the historical context.

1 Timothy 2:15 is skipped deliberately as it doesn’t particularly add to our understanding of roles in the church. One likely understanding of this verse is that it refers to our ultimate salvation through the birth of the Messiah through a woman (Mary), another understanding says it refers to woman’s unique role as a child bearer.

Priscilla helped her husband Aquila teach Apollos, however it was not done in the church context, but done privately. It is true they may have had a church meeting in their home, but there is no indication that this teaching of Apollos occurred in that context, and that doesn't make any sense anyway.

6 Roles in the Church 2

6.1 Headship

The Greek word *anthropos*, has been traditionally translated as “men”, but in modern translations it is more accurately translated as “people”, a generic term for humans, both male and female (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:1). The term *aner* (or *andros*) specifically refers to a man (or a husband), as opposed to a *gune* (a woman or wife). From these terms we get the word *androgynous* – meaning neither man nor woman. When analysing a passage, it is helpful to understand which terms are being used where.

God the Father is the head of Christ. To look at this concept in more detail, read 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. This says that Jesus is eternally subject to the Father.

Jesus is the head of man and man is the head of woman.

A woman is bringing dishonour to her head, possibly her husband, if she does not cover her head when praying. The head covering was a symbol that the woman was under authority. However, it does not have this symbolism today in western society, instead it means that a woman is a Muslim.

Similarly, today in Western society, a “shaved” head means the woman has recently had chemotherapy, or is “butch”. But then again, in some places in central Africa all women have “shaved” heads, it is the norm.

So, whether a woman has her head covered or shaved, the meaning is dependent on the culture, so if a woman wants to indicate that she is under authority, the method used to fulfil Paul's instruction depends on the society she lives in.

In the west, possible symbols of male headship that have survived, but are now disappearing, are a wife (only) wearing a wedding ring and a wife taking her husband's surname.

6.2 Church Leadership Roles

Paul identifies the roles of overseers and deacons in the church at Philippi.

6.2.1 Overseers / Elders

The overseer must be able to teach and manage or take care of the church.

A woman is not permitted to teach or have authority.

The role of overseer is reserved for men only.

An elder should be directing the affairs of (or ruling) the church, preaching and teaching. Not all elders performed all functions to the same degree, it seems some especially concentrated on, or worked hard at, preaching and teaching.

The role of elder is reserved for men only. An elder should be managing God's household, being God's steward and doing God's work. Additionally, he should encourage others by sound doctrine and give instruction and rebuke those who oppose it.

The description of the expected characteristics of an overseer or elder given here are probably only examples of what being blameless might look like, rather than being a detailed specification which every overseer or elder must conform to.

6.2.2 Deacons

The Apostles appointed seven men (only) to look after the distribution of food. This allowed the Apostles to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word (preaching and teaching).

Phoebe is described as a "diakonos", which could be translated as "servant" or "deacon", depending on your preference. Which is correct is a matter of debate, so whether she had the formal role of being a deacon, or was just being commended for being servant hearted is not clear. The way this sentence is worded indicates that she may have had the task of bringing this letter from Paul to Rome. The term deaconess wasn't used until about the 300s AD.

A deacon should be of high moral character. This is also true of a woman deacon.

6.3 Weighing Prophecy

The tongue speaker should be silent or keep quiet if there is no interpreter present. A prophet should be silent or stop if a revelation comes to another prophet. We have no problem with understanding that these are particular instances where these people should remain silent, they are not blanket prohibitions.

In the same way, women are to be silent and to be in submission when appropriate. It is not a blanket prohibition.

The "others", possibly the other prophets, or it may be the others in the whole church, should weigh what is said. However, given verses 34 to 35, possibly it should only be the men who do this.

7 How should men and women then live?

7.1 Commendations

Paul views the women in this list very positively, they have had a major and valuable role in the church and his life.

In verse 7, Andronicus and Junia are likely to be a married couple (Andronicus being a man's name and Junia being a woman's name). It has been suggested that Junia is being described as an apostle here. The title "apostle" is generally used of the 12 Apostles with the later addition of Paul. However, occasionally it is also used of other people. Alternatively, the expression may mean that this couple is well known to, and valued by, the apostles.

In any case, there also is some dispute as to whether Junia should in fact be translated as Junias - a man's name. The name is very rare, and the difference depends on the accents added by later scribes (not in the original), so the correct translation is impossible to say with any certainty. That said, the probabilities tend slightly towards Junia being correct.

In many of the pastoral letters, we see lists of people to whom and from whom greetings are passed on, or who are commended for their work. These lists often include women, but the vast majority of those mentioned are men. From this we see again that women had a valuable, but maybe less obvious, role in the church.

7.2 Lifting Hands

Men are exhorted to pray without getting into disputes. Women are exhorted to dress modestly, concentrating on their deeds, not their dress. Paul sees that men and women are different, and they have different sins that they need to work on.

7.3 Notes to a Young Elder

Men treat other men as brothers, they should treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters and with absolute purity.

Widows should be caring for their families. An older widow would have been serving her husband, family and those in need.

Younger widows should marry and look after their children and their households.

Women should continue to look after the widows in their families. Presumably their husbands should support them in this.

7.4 What teaching to receive

Older men should be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Older women should be reverent in the way they live. They should not be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but teach what is good. They should urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, be self-controlled and pure, be busy at home, be kind, and be subject to their husbands. The older women are to instruct the younger women in these things, it is not the chief role of Titus! Presumably they should do this because they would do a better job of it than men, bringing a unique feminine perspective to the task.

Younger men should be self-controlled, doing what is good, showing integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech.

Each of these groups appears to have particular areas that Paul wants to address, men and women, old and young, have their unique temptations and so Paul instructs Timothy on how to deal with each group.

7.5 Wives and husbands

Wives should submit themselves to their own husbands and live lives of purity and reverence. Having a beauty that is not from outward adornment, but from the inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. They should follow Sarah's example. They should do this whether their husbands are believers or not.

Husbands should be considerate to their wives and treat them with respect, as fellow heirs.

Women who are single are recognised as being perfectly capable of making their own decisions (Num 30:9), so the provision in verses 10-15 is a recognition of the relationship between husband and wife. Of course, any decision that the husband makes will be an expression of his love for his wife and his giving up of himself for her (Eph 5:25). Today, husbands and wives need to work together to figure out how decision making is to be done as a couple. One possibility is that there are certain areas where it is agreed that decisions can be made without reference to the other, and other areas where decisions should be considered provisional until reference is made to the other, with the husband making the final decision as required.

7.6 All Equal

All who are baptised into Christ are children of God, Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

Earthly roles, gender or ancestry do not make any difference to this.

7.7 To Finish

Paul gives different lists for men and women of different ages, because they are different. It is because they have different pressures on them, different temptations and different needs, so they need different care.

That God chose only men to fulfil certain roles in the history of his people is plain when we look at who were chosen to write the Bible through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

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Resources

God's Good Design - What the Bible really says about Men and Women by Claire Smith. Published by Matthias Media. 255 Pages. 2019.

This is an excellent book that looks into a number of key Bible verses in detail, but is still quite readable. Now in its second edition.

<https://matthiasmedia.com.au/products/gods-good-design>

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood - A Response to Evangelical Feminism edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. Published by Crossway Books. 566 Pages. 2006.

This is a very detailed accounting of all sorts of issues surrounding this topic. For the serious student, but useful as a resource for others.

You can download a pdf for free at:

<https://cbmw.org/topics/complementarianism/recovering-biblical-manhood-womanhood/>

Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning (9Marks Journal) by Jonathan Leeman, Albert Mohler, Rosaria Butterfield, Tom Schreiner, Alex Strauch, Kevin DeYoung, Michael Lawrence, Greg Turner, Andy Johnson, Bobby Jamieson. Published by 9Marks. 138 Pages. 2019.

<https://www.9marks.org/journal/complementarianism-a-moment-of-reckoning/>

You can download an ebook for free, or read it on line.

This is a detailed look at current issues in the debate.

The Role of Women (Condensed Version) by The Village Church

<https://thevillagechurch.net/our-beliefs>

This is one church's attempt to match their church life to what we read in Scripture. They also have a more detailed statement available (*The Role of Women (Full Version)*) which goes into their scriptural reasoning in more detail.

Embracing Complementarianism - Turning Biblical Convictions into Positive Church Culture by Graham Beynon & Jane Tooher. 2022

<https://www.thegoodbook.com.au/embracing-complementarianism>

A biblical vision for the complementary roles of men and women in the church—and how to put it into practice.

Complementarian Ministry in small group leadership - with Kara Hartley and Tony Payne on The Pastor's Heart Podcast.

An interview discussing how men and women might work together in leadership of small groups. 7th March, 2023.

<https://www.thepastorsheart.net/podcast/complementarian-small-groups>

The NET Bible® ©1996, 2019 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C.
<https://netbible.com>

This is a modern translation which has excellent translation notes which can be helpful when looking at the original meaning of those “tricky” verses.

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