

"What is your view on women in Ministry?"

Nevertheless, I was fully neutral on this issue when I first went about researching it. After reading dozens of different theologians, I realized that most of this debate comes down to two primary proof texts in scripture. But before exploring them, allow me to recap the historical context of women during the time in which Paul's letters were written.

Christ was *not* leading a women's liberation movement; however, when you consider how degraded women were during the times of Christ, the role he allowed women to play in his movement was definitely a large step forward. In fact, allow me to quote a few thoughts that illustrate how people viewed women:

Socrates, the "great Greek Thinker", said: *"to be a woman is a divine punishment since a woman is half-man, half-animal."* Wow, now that's a flattering assessment, isn't it Ladies!? In fact, most Athenian men saw women exclusively as objects of pleasure. The "Great" Aristotle taught that *"the courage of a man was shown in commanding a woman."* And, in an ironic sort of way, there's still a bit of truth to that (I tried it early on in my marriage and lost all my courage!) The great Pericles taught that *"women should be so far retired from men's business that 'her name would never be mentioned among men.'" And remember, this was commonly taught to men of those times. So the fact that the Bible even lists women as Christ followers was somewhat scandalous in certain parts of Greek culture. After all, in most places, women were forbidden to do anything with men. It was a totally segregated state. And in certain parts of the middle east, it still is.*

In fact, the ideal Greek woman was: a quiet un-educated women. Education was often thought of as a liability when it came to finding a female spouse. So, when Jesus allowed women disciples to travel with Him, this was a rather stunning gesture.

In his Book [Women in the Ministry of Jesus](#) Ben Witherington wrote:

"We know women were allowed to hear the word of God in the synagogue but they were never disciples of a rabbi unless their husband or master was a rabbi willing to teach them. Though a woman might be taught certain negative precepts of the Law out of necessity, this did not mean they would be taught rabbinic explanations of Torah. For a Jewish woman to leave home and travel with a rabbi was not only unheard of, it was scandalous. Even more scandalous was the fact that women, both respectable and not, were among Jesus' traveling companions" (p. 117).

So, in the cultural context, Christianity seemed to be a clear elevation of women. However, despite these advances, there were definitely limitations on women in scripture.

For example, in Luke chapter six when Jesus selected the 12 Apostles, not one was a woman. And this wasn't accidental. In fact in Acts 1:21 (when they were replacing Judas), they specifically limited the position to a man. And throughout most of the Bible, spiritual leadership gravitated towards men.

But, here's the Million Dollar Question: "Why did God gravitate towards men as leaders?" Did God do this because He "designed men" from the beginning to be leaders? Or, was God just working through the cultural realities of those times? Hence, because the culture was "male dominated", Jesus "chose his battles" in order

to win a greater war: the war for our souls?

Of course, before we throw out the "Christ Working-through-culture" approach, remember that God "adapted his rules" to the realities of the culture before (even when it wasn't his original intension).

For example, the Bible teaches that God didn't like divorce; yet, he allowed it due to "hardened hearts." Or, as another example: God didn't want Israel to have a king in the Old Testament; yet, he relented and gave them Saul. Therefore, the questions remain: Did God *eternally design* women to be "equal in value" yet "subservient in role"? Or, was God simply working through the existing culture? (Thus, to reach a male dominated culture, he chose 12 men Apostles?)

Now, these two approaches are important because they form the two main positions on women in ministry. (And here's a little "theological lingo" for you). The *Complementarian* Position states that men & women are "equal in value; yet different in role." I.e., Women are valuable but, were never meant to teach doctrine or be spiritual leaders. The *Egalitarian* Position states that men & women are different in gender, but similar in their roles before God. So with this in mind, let's look at one of the two main texts at the base of this debate, 1 Corinthians 14:33.

In the context, the Corinthians were a church filled with disorder. There was a lot of fighting. Numerous people were fighting for the opportunity to speak. Visitors are starting to leave. So Paul starts laying everyone flat with rebukes from a pastoral heart. And finally he gets to the Corinthian women:

14:33 "As in all the congregations of the saints, ³⁴ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

Now the main question that scholars ask of this text is this: Is this a universal command, or, was this advice for a specific situation? Complementarian Approach would say: The text says, "As in ALL the congregations of the saints." After all, a complementarian would argue: "*It doesn't say 'SOME of the congregations.'*" But the Egalitarian approach would refute: This verse isn't universal! He may say: "it's disgraceful for a woman to speak"... But we have to take this lightly. After all, two chapters earlier, he's telling women how to prophesy (how to publically declare the oracles of God), so he's obviously *not* saying that women universally can't speak!" After all, if Paul can happily work with female prophetesses in the book of Acts, then surely Paul could not intend what Complementarians interpret him to be saying.

In other words, an Egalitarian would argue that "when Paul writes 'as in ALL the congregations,' he really means, 'As in ALL the congregations of the saints IN CORINTH!' Or, he simply means, 'When women are acting crazy like you...like I would do in any congregation, I'd make you shut-up!'"

So you can see 2 different approaches: Complementarians approach texts like these with the assumption that verses like these are the evidence of a universal design of God that he thought up before we were created. On the other hand, Egalitarians approach texts like these with the assumption that "it's just specific advice for a specific situation."

And frankly, this is the problem in just about every proof text on this issue: Most of the texts are enculturated enough that it's tough to discern whether we're

reading a “Universally Transcendent Command” vs. “Specific Advice.” For the most part, our interpretations seem to reveal our preconceived biases more so than they reveal Paul’s perlocutionary intent. So, to be intellectually honest, allow me show you just how tricky this can be.

Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Tim. 5:23 “*23 Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*” Was this meant to be a universal command... or was this advice for a specific situation? And, how do you know? Then, 1 Timothy 2:12 (the other classic passage) “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” Once again, was this meant to be a universal command... or was this advice for a specific situation?

I mean, how do we know with certainty if Paul is trying to say: “Timothy, in your situation, I do not permit...” After all, remember the implications of this interpretation are huge. We’re talking about benching 68% of the body of Christ from preaching publically.

As another example from the Corinthian context: 1 Cor. 11:5 teaches that any women who prays or prophesies should have her head covered. And vs. 15 says that women should have long hair... it’s a disgrace for women to have short hair. It also says that long-hair on guys is a disgrace...(so when I first was hired as a pastor... I had a pony-tail that went all the way down to my belt (I was a real hippy at the time). As you’d imagine I got a lot of letters from angry church members over my hair :)

But before I digress too far: Is this verse for today? Or, was Paul just addressing a specific cultural issue? i.e., Was this a universal command for hair styling that existed in the mind of God before creation? Or, was this advice for a specific situation? Some Egalitarians charge Complementarians of being selective about their literal interpretations. After all, if you’re going to advocate that silencing women" is a universal command, then, three chapters earlier, you better advocate that women having long hair is equally universal.

Again, many Christian leaders believe, based on 1 Cor. 14:34, that women can’t speak in church. And they argue that this command is a relevant “universal command’ for today; yet, the entire rest of the chapter is all about using unknown tongues & prophecy. (which is something that many Complementarians ignore).

Whenever, I point this out, they defensively fabricate weird theories like, “Yea, but Peter, that stuff was just for first century Christians... it’s not for us today.” Oh, but suddenly, two verses later these same people say, “*Oh, but the women stuff, now that’s relevant!*”

Of course, my point here is not to say: “Everyone’s interpretation is silly but mine isn’t.” Rather, I’m simply trying to point out how complex these passages can be. So, when people make this issue out to be super black and white, it really irritates me because it isn’t.

So, allow me to humbly suggest an interpretation that, to me, makes more sense in light of the Corinthian context. In Chapter 14, he starts with rebuking the tongue-talkers. Apparently, they were speaking in their unknown tongues and in Vs. 23, it was clearly freaking visitors out. So, Paul basically says, under these circumstances: “*Be silent!*”

Then Paul takes on the prophets. They weren’t prophesying in turn, nor

were they carefully weighing what each other were saying so, once again, he restricts them. Thus, can you see a pattern emerging here in First Corinthians? He's saying: "You tongue talkers, under these circumstances, *be silent!* You prophets, under these circumstances, *be silent.*" And finally Paul gets to the ladies and says, "Under these circumstances, be silent!"

You see, none of Paul's previous restrictions were "universal designs of God creating subservience before the creation of the world." Yet this is exactly how Complementarians are asking us to read this.

Frankly, if you're gonna argue that this verse takes women out of ministry, you better be willing to do exactly what the verse says and make sure that women remain *entirely silent* in the church at all times. After all, *that* would at least be consistent.

Lastly, if you're gonna argue that women were universally designed to be subservient to men, you better be willing to fight this battle *outside of the church* in the secular workplace as well. After all, it seems a bit awkward to have a female boss when you believe they are "out of God's will" by playing that role.

That's why the leading systematic theologian on Complementarianism started taking bold stands when he wrote "83 things that women should not do in churches." In his 800+ page treatise, he concluded that, "*Women should not be greeters... Should not give announcements... edit the church newsletter...or sing a solo on Sunday morning...They should not teach the Bible to a Junior High Sunday School class... [and] they should not pray publically*" to quote a few.

One of the troublesome things about this debate is that no one thinks of the practical implications of this issue. For the most part, the debate about women in ministry generally occurs between "ivory tower evangelicals" who are rather detached from what is going on in the earth.

In Minneapolis, for some strange reason, this is a large debate. Yet, ironically, in Anoka county where I live, less than 5% of all people go to any Bible believing church of any kind. The rest of the U.S. only averages 9.1%. In other words, Christianity as we know it is dying in the U.S. So, when evangelicals find time to sit around and debate this, it immediately shows me that they are probably evangelicals who are completely detached from reality.

It's like we're on a sinking ship and yet the sailors strangely find time to debate whether the ship's color is ivory or off-white. So keep in mind, when people divide the body of Christ over this issue, I guarantee you that the Holy Spirit of God does not take kindly to such silliness during such dire times.

Even more, studies show that over 68% of the body of Christ is women. So, the implication of this doctrine are rather dramatic. If we bench women from the public preaching of scripture, it's much like trying to win the super-bowl with both arms tied behind our backs. So, if we do believe that God's Word forbids women from teaching, then we must also believe that God is aware of the calamitous circumstances that it would create.

As for me: I believe that the teaching of scripture is the single greatest thing we can do to help transform lives. It's hard to agree with this value when we're benching almost three-quarters of Christ's body from teaching. And if you agree with me about the power of God's Word, then you know that when scripture is

preached, divorce is decreased. Marriages are strengthened. Promiscuity is curbed and thus AIDS orphaning is stemmed. Because of the preaching of scripture, drug dealers, mob bosses, sex traffickers, and rapists repent. So, when we reduce the public preaching of scripture by 68%, that means we directly increase rape, genocide and torture on the earth. (I realize it sounds extreme; but, on a practical level, it's nonetheless true).

So, before you listen to some detached ivory-tower academic ramble on this issue, make sure you understand the implications of your decision. A lack of women preachers can be measured in blood and tears. And yes, I realize that this might sound dramatic; but, it's just that 90% of the books I read on this issue are being written by insulated wealthy American evangelicals. But having spent a significant amount of time building churches in foreign countries, these are the actual ramifications of such a theology.

Obviously, I do not agree with Complementarianism. Of course, I also do not whole-heartedly sign off on Egalitarianism either. Of course, I never force anyone in my church to agree with me. And I've never felt the need to separate myself from churches that preach this. After all, with the sad state of the American church being what it is, we need all hands on deck.

But, at the end of the day, I need to make a practical decision on this in order to run our church. And it suffices to say that I believe that women can be perfectly great leaders in the body of Christ.

People ask me all the time: *Why is Substance averaging over 80 new members per month?* Amongst other reasons, I believe it's because we allow the full body of Christ to operate in their gifts.

Some of the best Bible teachers on the earth are women. And I refuse to desecrate the grace that God placed within them simply because of an incredibly small number of complicated verses (that can easily be soundly interpreted from another angle). It often feels like we're caging birds and then brainwashing ourselves to believe that this was God's eternal intent.

Of course, I have not engaged passages like 1 Tim.2:11 or Eph. 5 here. Again, my goal is not to write an exhaustive treatise on women, even though I have perfectly good interpretations for these passages as well.

Rather, I'm too busy helping sex addicts and unchurched people find the power of the cross. And frankly, you should be too. If I could even get 25% of my city to even attend a church, let alone read the Bible, maybe *then* I'll have the time to write a more thorough refutation of Complementarianism's silliness.

In the meantime, Ladies, I hope you'll preach God's word to all creation. After all, there are millions of male AIDS orphans who could be helped by your preaching. There are over 8 million people stuck in sex trafficking (and hundreds of millions more who contribute to this system). In fact, even now there are around 27 million people who live in virtual slavery. All of them need to hear God's word preached to them, even if it's by a woman.

Even more: As of today, the Bible still hasn't been translated and preached in every language. So I hope that your desire to involve yourselves in such tasks would never be abated due to dogmatic interpretations.

Ladies: You are 68% of the body of Christ. You are an army of world-

changers, redeemed by God for such a time as this. Thus, I put a new spin on Paul's classic charge to Timothy: *"Do not let anyone look down on you because you are a woman. But set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."*