

God, Godliness, and Gifts—The Role of Women in Ministry

God has given us his word, his instruction as a **guardrail** to preserve us and to protect us in the way we should go. When we are outside the guardrails it always ends in harm, hurt, a blown tire, car trouble, a stalled out journey, and in the worst case scenario—destruction.

When it comes to God's design for the church and the role of women in ministry—we see most clearly **two extremes outside the guardrails** God has designed. To one side you have the extreme that limits the gifts and service of women to the nursery and the kids, the kitchen, or a committee or two. This leaves many of the ladies in our churches feeling discouraged and inferior, not seeing any place in God's church to use the gifts he's given to them that matches what they see described in Scripture.

The extreme on the other side of the guardrail is to say there is no limit—any gift and any position described in Scripture is open to women, just as it is to men.

God has a better path where the church operates in the purposes of the Lord and it leads to fulfillment, joy, clarity, godly leadership, care compassion, love from a pure (clean) heart, a good conscience, and a sincere expression of faith.

As we get started, here is a basic breakdown of the two prevalent views about the role of women in ministry.

Egalitarianism concludes that men and women are equal before God not only in their image-bearing but also in their respective vocations. God does not assign leadership based on gender, neither in the

church nor in the home. All positions of leadership—both formal and informal—are open to women as well as to men.

“Complementarianism” says that while men and women are created equally in the image of God and have equal value and dignity, they nevertheless have different, complementary callings both in marriage and in the church.

Which view appears to align more closely with God’s word?

Men and women are equal in image, dominion, and salvation. There are differences in biology and in social roles within the home and the church. Within Genesis and the creation account we find the equality of image and dominion. However we also see the life giving nature of God’s design of biological differences as well as a social structure built into the first family and then carried through in the New Testament in the design and structure of the church.

Theologian, Wayne Grudem, points out 10 reasons for the belief in male headship, prior to the fall. Let me point out just a few, as I believe his emphasis from scripture reinforces the biblical nature of complementarianism.

1. **The creation order**—Adam was created first. Eve was created out of Adam. As the first of mankind, Adam was designated by the Lord as the one with the leadership responsibility. God’s commands were given first to Adam before Eve was ever created. It was Adam who was given the initial command to work the garden and to keep it (guard it).
2. **The purpose**—Eve was created as a helper for Adam. She was created specifically as the helper for him and equal to him in nature.
3. **The conflict**—The curse introduced upon Adam and Eve after the Fall introduces a distortion of previous roles, not an introduction of new roles. Adam would experience pain in his particular area of responsibility in working the garden. Eve would experience pain

his her particular area of responsibility in bearing children. There was also a third curse—an introduction of pain and conflict into their relationship. Where there used to be harmony in their relationship, now Adam would have a sinful desire to rule aggressively and harshly and Eve would have a sinful desire to rule and to control her husband.

4. **The representation**—Adam is named as the representative for mankind for our sinful nature. He abdicated his leadership role in that sinful moment and is named by the Lord as the one who ushered in death.
5. **The primary accountability**—the Lord spoke to Adam first after the Fall, calling him to account for what had happened, even though he already knew everyone's responsibility in the rebellion.

This morning, the goal is to take a look at how scripture defines the role of women in ministry. Let's see if there are ties to the Old Testament that inform how we should define the role. Let's see if God has in fact set up some guardrails to help guide us to his good design.

So, what are the do's and the don'ts of the Role of Women in Ministry?
Let's begin with the role God has NOT called women to perform in the life of the church.

1Ti 2:11-14 (ESV) Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. [12] I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve; [14] and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

The implications of what Paul describes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are these:

1. Women were encouraged to learn and to grow, to be educated in their knowledge of God and his word.

2. To learn quietly with all submissiveness was, as Thomas Schreiner writes in his exposition of 1 Timothy, to learn with a quiet, gentle demeanor that was peaceable and not argumentative.
3. We notice from the passage that the word “quiet” forms a bookend around verses 11 & 12. Submissiveness then continues Paul’s pattern that we’ve already seen in 1 Corinthians. We are all in submission to Christ as Lord. The men follow the leadership of Christ and the women in turn humbly follow the leadership of their husband. Here Paul describes a submission on the part of the women to the leadership God has appointed in the church.
4. Paul is specifically stating that the two leadership responsibilities that were not permitted to the women were to teach or to exercise authority. Even more specific to the discussion when you tie in the verses that follow:

1Ti 3:1-2 (ESV) The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. [2] Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Women were not to perform the role of teaching and exercising authority over men in serving as the pastor, bishop, overseer, elder of the assembled church.

Examples of what ministry roles women are not called to perform:

- A. Senior pastor in a local church.
- B. Giving spoken judgment on a prophecy in the congregation.
- C. Preaching and teaching the Bible to the whole church.
- D. Bible teaching to an adult Sunday School class or home group of men and women. Sunday School teachers, by default, tend to be the pastor of the class and teach the word of God in an authoritative capacity.

- E. Specifically, we see Priscilla and her husband Aquila working alongside Paul for at least 18 months in the city of Corinth. Paul stayed with them in their home, which functioned as a house church. Later they traveled with Paul to Ephesus and we are told that Priscilla and Aquila found the disciple Apollos there. They took him aside and explained the word of God more accurately to him. Priscilla and Aquila spent about 3 years in Ephesus with Paul working to disciple others and to build the church. This couple apparently returned to Ephesus before Paul was taken to Rome and executed. Paul knew they were in the church in Ephesus because he addresses them in his final letter (2 Tim. 4:19). Priscilla had what amounted to 4 1/2 years of bible teaching from Paul. He spent more time in Ephesus than anywhere else teaching men and women the word of God. Yet, it is to this congregation that he gives the instruction for women not to teach or to exercise authority over men in the church.

So the one guardrail of what women cannot do is to be the shepherd, pastor, teacher, exercising authority over the church, the body of Christ. This is not culturally rooted or patriarchal. Paul ties his command directly back to the creation and God's design for leadership, authority, submission and help.

1. Paul grounds the command in the creation order and the leadership role, helper role.
2. Paul also roots the command in what is believed to be the predominant meaning of verse 14—Wayne Grudem writes in his systematic theology, “While God made men and women, in general, with equal intellectual abilities, there are still differences in preferences and inclinations, and those differences are consistent with God’s purposes in entrusting leadership in the church to men. God gave men, in general, a disposition that is better suited to teaching and governing in the church, a disposition that inclines more to rational, logical analysis of doctrine and a desire to protect the doctrinal purity of the church, and God gave women, in general, a disposition that inclines more toward a relational, nurturing emphasis that

places a higher value on unity and community in the church. Both emphases are needed, of course, and both men and women have some measure of both tendencies. But Paul understands the kinder, gentler, more relational nature of women (in general) as something that made Eve less inclined to oppose the deceptive serpent and more inclined to accept his words as something helpful and true.

3. One quick word about Adam's failed responsibility in the garden. He was supposed to guard the garden according to God's command. He failed to protect Eve when the serpent came to deceive her. I believe this is why he is named first in responsibility for the Fall. He failed to lead and to protect and to uphold the word of God.

However, we must be careful. Our tendency is to gravitate to extremes. In our desire to be faithful to what the Lord has commanded in his word, we can add our own man-made guidelines that end up keeping women from ministry that God has equipped them, by his Spirit, to perform.

Mrk 7:8 (ESV) You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

Mrk 7:13 (ESV) thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."

That leads me to our next point of discussion. What are the roles of women in ministry that God has called them to perform in the life of the church?

1Ti 2:9-10 (ESV) likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, [10] but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.

1Pe 3:3-4 (ESV) Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— [4] but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

The first command we must ALL focus on is this—exercise your gifts out of the overflow of your relationship with the Lord. Think of the process like this—

Pursuit of God that leads to godliness that in turn empowers the gifts.

As a result, we see in Scripture these ministry roles for women:

- A. Praying and prophesying in public worship (1 Cor. 11).**
- B. Sharing of what God has done as a word of testimony or praise.**
- C. The Prophet Joel says that in the last days men and women will have dreams and visions (Joel 2:28-29).**
- D. Throughout the gospels we see women as a part of Jesus' earthly ministry—helping, serving, providing financially, witnessing, discipling, etc.**
- E. In the book of Acts we see men and women together being saved, baptized, and going to prison for their faith. We see women serving in the church to advance the gospel message through evangelism and discipleship. We see women giving financially, practicing hospitality to open their home for house churches.**
- F. They could and did teach children in their home and in the church (in our current church context this would also include youth).**
- G. They could teach and disciple other women.**

Tit 2:3-5 (ESV) Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, [4] and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, [5] to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and

submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

H. Care for relatives who are widows.

1Ti 5:16 (ESV) If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

- I. If the parameter is teaching and leading authoritatively of the church body, then there should be nothing within our current church context that would prohibit women from being an usher, greeter, serving on committees, teaching VBS, reading scripture in the worship service, counseling, and mission work.**
- J. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus gave specific instructions to the eleven remaining disciples that they in turn passed along to the gathered church. Included in that command to evangelize and disciple was to baptize believers. Therefore, performing a baptism would be biblically appropriate for a woman.**
- K. Serving communion is not a teaching moment or an exercise of authority in the life of the church. The pastor presides over the teaching moment, the deacons serve the elements. There is nothing authoritatively stated in scripture that provides this structure. It could be served by any and all believing men and women within the body of Christ.**

Just as we cannot create man-made guardrails about the role that women cannot play. We also cannot go to the other extreme and rip away all guardrails as egalitarianism would want to do. God has beautifully saved women by his grace and given them vital roles in the church that are meant to adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ for God's glory.

As a church, our responsibility is to be faithful to the word of God, staying within the guardrails he has designed.