

MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

AN EXEGESIS AND APPLICATION PROJECT

BY

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## Introduction

One of the more contested topics in modern evangelicalism is the role of women in the church. How women can serve in the church has been discussed for a very long time, but has revived in the modern period thanks to a cultural shift towards gender equality. The new interest has spurred on new scholarship in this discipline. There are two basic streams of interpretation and application regarding roles that women can hold in the local church. These two streams are in direct opposition when it comes to allowable roles for women, and are represented by the names complementarians and egalitarians.

Complementarianism, also called paternalism, hierarchicalism, or traditionalism, states that women are not able to hold senior leadership positions in the local church. There is not unity in complementarian circles in regards to what positions women are disqualified from, but there is unanimity in the restriction of women from the role of elder. Some strains of complementarianism allow for women to serve in the role of deacon. Complementarians believe the Bible teaches that God's created order elevates men to leadership of the family, and subsequently the church. Passages written by the Apostle Paul, such as I Timothy 2:11-15, and I Corinthians 14:34-35, confirm those beliefs. Women are designed to fulfill a complementary role to that of men, serving alongside them, and using their gifts to accomplish the mission of the church. The roles they are allowed to hold, however, preserve a male hierarchy in leadership. All but the most extreme complementarians would agree that there is equality between the sexes, but this equality is of form not of function.<sup>1</sup> Rigid forms of complementarianism prohibit women from speaking, or may require head coverings in an organized worship service. In the more common forms of this view, women are able to teach in the church, but their audience of

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin, for example, teaches that women are subservient to men. John Calvin, *Commentaries, The Epistles of Paul, I Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company), 354.

instruction is limited to women and children. Women may be allowed to serve as deacons, but are restricted from the office of elder.

Egalitarians, in contrast, believe that men and women are of equal form and can fulfill equal function. A hallmark verse of the egalitarian viewpoint is Galatians 3:28 where Paul addresses the removal of distinctions of people who are in Christ. Paul says, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” To the egalitarian, distinctions like gender are as obliterated as the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Their view of church leadership is an extension of this belief system, and they allow women and men to serve in the same roles. Egalitarian churches have women serving in all roles and offices in the church, including elders and deacons. This position is also known as evangelical feminism or biblical equality.

Tradition and historical assumptions may suffice for orthopraxy in many situations, however the serious biblical scholar has to investigate the relevant biblical passages and determine what the Bible teaches in order to establish a doctrine for women in ministry roles. This project will examine six core Bible verses, two in-depth and four as an executive summary. This exegesis will be leveraged to answer four practical questions about ministry: what are the offices or leadership positions in the church, which of these are women able to fill, what types of teaching are women empowered to do, and what level of authority can they hold? Those questions will then be applied to the specific ministry context of the author, and an analysis will be made to determine how to align doctrine with practice.

## **Biblical Foundation**

I Corinthians 11:2-16

Paul wrote the letter known as I Corinthians to the church at Corinth primarily to correct major issues in the church body. Paul founded this church (Acts 18:1), and ministered there for more than eighteen months before departing. Paul subsequently received reports from friends in the assembly (I Corinthians 1:11), and was presented with questions for him to answer.<sup>2</sup> Paul responded in I Corinthians, and addressed both the problems in the church and the assembly's questions. The letter contains six sections: introduction, division and discord in the church (chapters 1-6), practical issues of faith (chapters 7-10), church order (chapters 11-14), the guarantee of the faith (chapter 15), and the conclusion.

Chapter 11 begins the third division of the letter, addressing church order. Immediately preceding this chapter, Paul discusses the practical aspects of being a Christ follower in Corinth. He deals with marriage and personal freedom issues, and then transitions into instruction on how the church should act. The first correction found in 11:2-16 deals with a subject that will contribute to understanding how women may serve in ministry; however, women in service is not Paul's primary topic. In Corinth, the church was engaging in practices that blurred the distinction between men and women.<sup>3</sup>

The specific issue the Corinthian church struggled with relates to head coverings in corporate worship. In verses 4-6, Paul specifically addresses this practice and how the Corinthians should understand it. As Paul does this, his argument seems to be based on a

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Lee and David Black, *The New Testament, Its Background and Message*, 2d. ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 404.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality, Complementarity Without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 159.

hierarchy established by God at creation. In this hierarchy, women and men are equal (v. 11-12), but have different responsibilities in regards to their relationship to each other (v.3). A proper understanding of what Paul is teaching, as well as how it applies to the modern reader, is crucial. Paul's argument is complex, and does not lend itself to easy interpretation. Paul's convoluted arguments, the distance between modern culture and Corinth in the First Century, the problem of discerning exactly what practice Paul has an issue with, and the difficulty of establishing a definite meaning for some of the primary terms Paul used in this section all contribute to making this passage problematic for interpreters.<sup>4</sup>

### **I Corinthians 11:2-3**

In the introductory portion, Paul begins by commending the Corinthians for remembering him in their practices. This statement seems almost disingenuous, if not blatantly sarcastic, given the way Paul has rebuked the Corinthians in the first ten chapters of his letter. But this conclusion is not necessarily accurate, as this introduction also makes sense as a *captatio benevolentiae*.<sup>5</sup> Paul starts with praise in order to win the goodwill of his hearers, before offering them another rebuke for their actions. Paul mentions the *τὰς παραδόσεις* (traditions) he taught the Corinthians, and how they were mindful of them. This focus on their prior willingness to heed his instruction sets the stage for this new correction they now need to implement. Unlike his beginning in 7:1, Paul does not mention a question he is answering for the Corinthians. It is likely that he heard about their practices through those who brought him news of the church's

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<sup>4</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987, reprint 1989), 492

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, C.K., *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 247.

troubles and wrote to correct them preemptively. He thought their actions were causing enough of an issue to address in this letter.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 3 begins Paul's argument about head coverings. He begins with what Fee identifies as a *theologoumenon*, a statement about theology that is in the area of opinion not doctrine.<sup>7</sup> This statement is the cornerstone of his teaching in this passage. Paul tells the Corinthians, in a comparison that visually resembles a mathematical compound inequality, about the interdependence of man, woman, Christ, and God. Paul writes that Christ is the head of every man, man is the head of every woman, and God is the head of Christ. The way the comparison is constructed, the middle term is accentuated by the outer terms, which is fitting since the male/female relationship is at issue.<sup>8</sup> Some translations (ESV, TLB) translate "man" and "woman" as "husband" and "wife." Paul uses the generic nouns *άνήρ* and *γυνή* in this passage, which carry the sense of both meanings. The specific meaning of the passage has to be determined by context. The translations that use "husband" and "wife" come to that conclusion by assuming the passage is about hierarchical relationships. However, there is no article indicating that "husband" and "wife" should be used.<sup>9</sup>

Understanding what Paul is establishing in his three-part comparison begins with determining the meaning of the common word driving each comparison: *κεφαλή*. This term is difficult to understand because of the nature of the argument Paul is building. The word is literally translated "head," but it is also used metaphorically in this passage. The metaphorical

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<sup>6</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 530. Fee thinks Paul was reasonably underwhelmed by his own argument.

<sup>7</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 504.

<sup>8</sup> Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One In Christ, An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 109.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

meaning has to be determined from the cultural context, as its usage here is unclear. The metaphorical usage in I Corinthians 11:3 is the only time that Paul uses the image of “head” where it is not directly tied to a “body,” making the meaning even more difficult to determine.<sup>10</sup>

There are two primary interpretations for Paul’s meaning of *κεφαλή* in this passage. The first carries the idea of “leader” or “ruler.” This is the traditional understanding of Paul’s words. There are several reasons why this meaning could be correct, beginning with the fact that Greek lexicons generally give this as the metaphorical meaning.<sup>11</sup> Secondly, in Hebrew thought, this metaphor would be indicative of an authoritative relationship where man rules over woman.<sup>12</sup> If Paul is addressing Jews, they will understand that he means authority. Combining this meaning with verses 7-9, it paints the picture that Paul is establishing male headship based on the order of creation. This conclusion drives the complementarian argument, and is reflected in the commentaries written by these scholars. Peter Naylor sums up this view when he states that the hierarchy implied by *κεφαλή* “is of function” not of value.<sup>13</sup>

The second possible meaning for *κεφαλή* is “source.” In Greek thought, *κεφαλή* as a metaphor had a wider range of meaning than in Hebrew.<sup>14</sup> Instead of “head” meaning “ruler,” it would be more natural to read “head” as “source,” similar to the meaning of “headwaters.” Payne identifies this as the most intelligible meaning to “head” in this passage because it makes

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<sup>10</sup> Pierce and Groothuis, 149.

<sup>11</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Publishers, 2010), 122-123.

<sup>12</sup> Werner Neuer, *Men and Women in Christian Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 111.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Naylor, *I Corinthians* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2004), 274.

<sup>14</sup> Payne, 95.

the most sense in the Corinthian's Greek context.<sup>15</sup> There are examples of Paul using this meaning in his other letters. In Ephesians 4:15 and Colossians 2:19, Paul speaks of Christ as the *κεφαλή*, where "source" makes sense as the proper meaning of "head."<sup>16</sup> In addition, the translators of the LXX only rarely used *κεφαλή* to mean authority, indicating that most of them would not regard *κεφαλή* as the right word choice to represent authoritative leadership.<sup>17</sup> Additional supporting evidence for "source" comes from Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria, who concluded that *κεφαλή* must mean "source." To interpret it as "head" would support an Arian understanding of this verse, namely that Christ must submit to God.<sup>18</sup> This charge of subordinationism may be spurious, but their assessment shows that early patristic writers thought that "source" was Paul's intended meaning.

One other view of *κεφαλή* in this passage is a moderate position that attempts to reconcile the two primary views, arguing that *κεφαλή* means both "source" and "authority" in the passages. Schriener examines both sides of the argument and concludes that both meanings are present in the text.<sup>19</sup> However, this position contributes little to the discussion of what Paul is saying in regards to relationships between men and women. Charting a middle course leaves both options open, but makes it more difficult to determine Paul's meaning. If Paul was alternating between the literal and metaphorical sense of *κεφαλή*, the passage becomes even more complex, introducing an unnecessary layer of meaning to his message.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 97-100.

<sup>16</sup> Groothuis, Rebecca Merrill, *Good News For Women* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Books, 1997), 151.

<sup>17</sup> Payne, 95-96.

<sup>18</sup> Groothuis, 151.

<sup>19</sup> James R. Beck, ed., and Craig L. Blomberg, ed., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 212-213.

The arguments for and against the two primary understandings of *κεφαλή* are both very persuasive. Wayne Grudem did an exhaustive study of *κεφαλή* and its usage in the time period when Paul was writing. He concluded that there were no uses of *κεφαλή* that are best translated as “source” in the contemporary writing. In addition, he points out that no Greek lexicon lists “source” as a possible meaning for *κεφαλή*. His initial research concluded that “authority” is the only established meaning in Greek at the time of Paul’s writing.<sup>20</sup> Many other works have countered the claim that Chrysostom uses *κεφαλή* as “source,” concluding that he most certainly thought *κεφαλή* meant “authority.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, however, Philip Payne rebuts all of the claims that Grudem makes, listing multiple Greek lexicons that contain “source” as the meaning of *κεφαλή*. Payne cites contemporary research that argues “authority” was actually an uncommon meaning for *κεφαλή* when Paul was writing. Payne cites various texts from the time period that translate *κεφαλή* as “source.” Gordon Fee also concludes that the meaning of *κεφαλή* as “ruler” would be exceptional due to its rare use.<sup>22</sup>

The best conclusion of what Paul means, therefore, must flow from the text and Paul’s purpose in writing. The main point that Paul is trying to communicate has very little to do with a hierarchy of authority between men and women, but is instead intended to correct practices in the Corinthian church that were straining and confusing male/female relationships. In the preceding chapter, Paul states that he wants the Corinthians to “give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” (10:32). This theme carries into his present discussion, as the men and women in Corinth are giving offense by their practices in worship. Paul is not teaching on

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<sup>20</sup> Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 125.

<sup>21</sup> Wayne Grudem, ed., *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 146-157.

<sup>22</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 502-503.

authority structures, but on proper order.<sup>23</sup> The idea in verse 11-12 of interdependence clarifies that Paul is not establishing a creation-ordered hierarchy, but showing the uniqueness of man and woman in creation.<sup>24</sup> Fee rightly points out that any understanding of this text that concludes with a hierarchy had to bring hierarchy with them into the reading, because the context does not support it.<sup>25</sup>

Looking at the comparison itself, it is of note that Paul has stepped back from the specific circumstances to view interdependence from a distance. A good reason for this is that he had to step back far enough to get the Corinthians to agree with him before making a direct correction.<sup>26</sup> With a big picture perspective, the pride of the Corinthians would be less likely to prevent them from receiving Paul's teaching. Establishing a clear tie to the relationship between God, Christ, man, and woman grounds Paul's argument in something they would believe already; this makes sense of his appeal to their judgment (v. 13).

There are two possible meanings in Paul's comparison, closely related to the two possible meanings for *κεφαλή*: If Paul means "authority," he is creating an authority structure that should be followed, not just in Corinth, but in all churches and walks of life. Paul would be arguing from creation, and the innate authority of man over woman could not be limited. This is the traditional view, and the complementarian framework is built upon this supposed creation structure. Those who hold this view understand that the authority structure is one of function not essence due to the inclusion of Christ and God, hence eliminating subordinationism. That idea

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<sup>23</sup> David E. Garland, *I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 513

<sup>24</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 523.

<sup>25</sup> Pierce and Groothuis, 151.

<sup>26</sup> Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1889), 535.

fits nicely with the comparison to men and women: they are the same, but have different authority structures (Galatians 3:28).<sup>27</sup>

If “source” is the meaning Paul has in mind, the comparison becomes one of chronological order. Initially, Christ was the source of man at creation, man was the source of woman at her creation, and God was the source of Jesus at His incarnation. This comparison is not arguing for a relationship hierarchy, or the structure confuses the authoritative positions. One would expect God’s authority to be first, followed by Christ’s, then followed by man’s. However, the structure of encapsulation highlights the middle term, revealing Paul’s intent to discuss the relationship of men and women in the context of God’s theme of interdependence. Paul desires relationships in the church to reflect the dependence of each second term in this comparison on its source. Relationships in the church should be respectful, not disgraceful and offensive.<sup>28</sup> In conclusion, the proper understanding of *κεφαλή* is “source;” this is the meaning that Paul has in mind in verse 3.

### **I Corinthians 11:4-10**

In verses 4-6, Paul addresses the issue of covering one’s head during the worship gathering.<sup>29</sup> Commentators are divided on what Paul means when he says “prays and prophesies.” Some believe that Paul is being very specific and “prays” and “prophesies” are the only two actions that Paul is addressing here. Grudem states clearly that the New Testament always distinguishes teaching and prophesy, and taking the endorsement of one as endorsement

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<sup>27</sup> MacArthur page 254.

<sup>28</sup> Alvera Micklesen, *Women, Authority, and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 137.

<sup>29</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 505.

of the other is incorrect.<sup>30</sup> Others believe that Paul is speaking of all functions of the church gathering, because “prays” and “prophesies” are representative of the two core practices of the church. As Fee states, “Paul is being representative, not exhaustive” in the functions he addresses.<sup>31</sup> In chapter 14, Paul indicates that prophecy is the highest gift given to the church. If women were allowed to participate in that role, it seems likely to conclude that they could fulfill all other functions of ministry.<sup>32</sup>

In either case, Paul asserts that women and men both have the same ability to perform these functions. Paul states that men are to leave their heads uncovered because it is shameful for them to cover themselves, and women must cover themselves in order to not be shamed. “Head” is alternating between literal and metaphorical meanings in this passage, tying Paul’s statement to verse 3. Covering the head means covering the literal head, and dishonoring the head means to dishonor the metaphorical head (man dishonors Christ, woman dishonors man). There are two primary views on what is the head covering Paul refers to: a veil, or a woman’s hair.

The veil argument states that women generally wore a veil if they were not disreputable, as this social custom represented propriety.<sup>33</sup> Paul is telling the women “keep your veils on,” because removing them is causing discord in the congregation. If this view is correct, Paul is saying that no man would cover his head with a veil, because it is disgraceful for him, and no woman can cast aside her husband’s authority by removing her veil. It makes sense that some translations render *γυνή* as wife here, because the passage makes more sense as a wife

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<sup>30</sup> Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 136.

<sup>31</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 506

<sup>32</sup> Payne, 124.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969, reprint 1994.), 206.

dishonoring her husband if the veil is meant as a symbol of authority.<sup>34</sup> This is why many commentators assume that the topic in 4-6 is the relationship between husbands and wives.<sup>35</sup> If a respectable married woman must cover her head, then removing the cover would disgrace her husband and bring Paul's admonition. There are several difficulties with this view, the first being that the word veil is never mentioned in this passage and has to be supplied by the reader. Payne argues that there is no evidence to support Greek women veiling themselves in the first century so reading a veiling custom into this text would be anachronistic.<sup>36</sup> There is also no clear evidence that it would be dishonorable to disregard the veiling custom.<sup>37</sup>

The second view is that Paul is addressing a lack of adherence to the hairstyle customs of Corinthian culture. Men in the church were wearing long, effeminate hair, which would be representative of homosexual men in this culture. Paul's condemnation of homosexuality in Romans 1:26-27, and the cultural connotations of this hairstyle in Greek, Roman, and Jewish culture indicates this practice would certainly bring disgrace to the men in Corinth.<sup>38</sup> This behavior would also bring dishonor to God and ties in with Paul's inclusion of "the angels" in verse 10. The continued flow of discussion in verses 7-9 would center on presenting oneself honorably.

In contrast to the men, women are letting their hair hang loosely over their shoulders. This practice would bring dishonor, because it would typically indicate that she was available for

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<sup>34</sup> Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism*, 204-205.

<sup>35</sup> F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians 2* ed. (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1954), 249.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Payne, 125-126.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-117.

pagan sex acts, or that she was sexually free.<sup>39</sup> Loosing the hair also indicated participation in cultic practices in the city of Corinth, specifically the Dionysiac cult.<sup>40</sup> Paul tells the women that when they loose their hair, they are assuming the station of an adulteress or one with “her head shaved” (v. 5). This connects with the practice of shaving a woman’s head when she was convicted of adultery.<sup>41</sup> The Jewish process to determine if a woman has been unfaithful to her husband in Numbers 5:18 supports the idea that loose hair is equated with sexual immorality. When a Jewish woman was accused of sexual immorality, her hair would be loosed on account of her supposed impropriety, and when she was found guilty her head would be shaved.<sup>42</sup> The difficulty with this interpretation stems from verse 15 where Paul says that a woman’s long hair is given as a covering, which seems to differ from the covering mentioned in 4-6.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the text does not lend itself to the understanding that “covering” actually means “put her hair up.” Paul could have said, “put your hair up to be covered,” but instead he uses a very convoluted argument to make that point. It is likely that Paul is trying to be delicate with his language because the topic he is addressing is a difficult one.

In either case, Paul is saying that the practices of the men would dishonor Christ as creator, who made them male and female; and the practices of the women are dishonoring men because they were created distinctly from his side. In the context of this work, it is not necessary to know exactly which practice was being condemned, because the principle Paul is concerned

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 133-134.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>42</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her, A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (Danvers, MA: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994), 227. Payne, 147.

<sup>43</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 512.

with is the dishonoring practices that men and women were engaging in that caused division in the assembly.<sup>44</sup> It makes the text more understandable as a unit to understand the admonition in regards to hair, specifically because hair is mentioned in the text and head coverings are not. The cultural context and customs of Rome, Greece, and the Jews also make the most likely meaning of Paul's admonitions to men and women in Corinth about their hair.

In verses 7-9 Paul brings the argument from the local circumstances to a more general context based on creation. Paul tells the Corinthians that covering the head for a man is dishonoring because he is the image and glory of God, and a woman should cover her head for she is the glory of man. He then says that this is because woman was made from man and for man, not the reverse. This argument harkens back to Genesis 2:18-25, where God recognized that it was time to make man a companion. God put Adam to sleep and fashioned Eve from his rib. Adam then named her, and they were united in marriage.

Paul could be talking about created order, reaffirming the subordination of women to man.<sup>45</sup> In this view, woman is described as subordinate to man with the express purpose of bringing him glory.<sup>46</sup> MacArthur writes of these verses that, "man is the image and glory of God, because it showed what a great creature God could make, but woman is the image and glory of man, because it shows what a great creature God can make from man."<sup>47</sup> Man glorifies God by representing His image properly in conduct, and woman glorifies man in the same way. Women will bring glory to God by keeping their subordinate place to their authority (man, verse 3), as

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<sup>44</sup> Roy L. Laurin, *First Corinthians, Where Life Matures* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1950), 183.

<sup>45</sup> Hodge, 210.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Romans 9-16* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1994), 258.

men do to their authority (Christ, verse 3).<sup>48</sup> Paul's main point is to make sure women know their place in the church. This view has to be correct if *κεφαλή* means authority.

The second view is substantially different from the first. Instead of Paul teaching that women should know their place with respect to man via creation, Paul is applying verse 7-9 to blur gender lines, reminding men and women that God created them for each other. Assuming that the argument Paul was making in verse 4-6 is about long hair on men and unbound hair on women, this passage is specifically about proper sexual relationships. Men should desire to be with the partner that God made for them, because it reflects the original design of the Creator.<sup>49</sup> Woman is the glory of man, because she is his sexual partner.<sup>50</sup> When men and women engage in a proper sexual relationship it brings honor to the One who planned it, but if women become sexually free and men work against nature by being homosexuals, the sexual relationship no longer glorifies God. This view gains credence from the fact that the word "glory" never refers to subordination in the Scripture.<sup>51</sup> It is not clear from the text that the Corinthians were actually engaging in immoral behavior, but their presentation in public worship could have led to this assumption by church members and the community. Paul corrects this practice because he wants the church to have every opportunity to win people to Christ, and this behavior could hamper their influence in spreading the Gospel (I Corinthians 10:33).

Verse 10 is regarded as one of the more difficult passages to interpret in all of Scripture, especially for the subordination view. Paul makes two statements that are difficult to parse: that

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory J. Lockwood, *I Corinthians* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publish House, 2000), 371.

<sup>49</sup> Payne, 148.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>51</sup> Pierce and Groothuis, 152.

women should have “authority over her head,” and this is “because of the angels.” Fee argues the reason that Paul uses “authority” and “because of the angels” is that these are references to questions from the Corinthians. This would make interpretation difficult, because these questions are not available to the modern reader.<sup>52</sup> If this is true, it makes sense for Paul to include them in his response after his arguments of verses 3-9, but this is ultimately conjecture.

Understanding what Paul means when he says the woman ought to have *ἐξουσία* over her own head is crucial, and it is heavily influenced by the context of the entire passage. If one concludes that Paul is teaching a created order hierarchy, it would be expected for Paul to say “subjection” not authority.<sup>53</sup> Women having authority though they are themselves subordinate does not fit the context of what Paul is saying. Complementarians must understand Paul to mean that the woman has a “symbol” of her husband’s authority on her head, instead of having her own authority.<sup>54</sup> Godet says that “...most definitely the power she is under should be on her head.”<sup>55</sup> This means that the word “authority” is actually a metonym for veil.<sup>56</sup> In light of the presupposition that women must be under the authority of men, some translations like the RSV, have supplied the term veil into the text where it does not exist in the original. This would indicate directly that the authority Paul is speaking of actually rested in her husband. The problem with this view is that it forces *ἐξουσία* to be passive, and there are no other known texts

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<sup>52</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 518.

<sup>53</sup> Pierce and Groothuis, 156.

<sup>54</sup> Hodge, 211.

<sup>55</sup> Godet, 550.

<sup>56</sup> Roy E. Ciampa, and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 531.

where it is used this way.<sup>57</sup> In opposition to these conclusions, Grenz says the “Greek term (*ἐξουσία*) cannot be interpreted here as referring to a head covering, because every Pauline use of the term *ἐξουσία* designates an abstract reality, or one who has that reality.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, Paul is referring to the authority of a woman over her head, not a literal representation of the authority she is under. Other subordinationists believe that a woman has the authority to prophesy and pray in the church service only when properly adorned with authority given to her by her husband.<sup>59</sup> Adherents to the subordination view struggle with this verse, because the conclusion that a woman is under another’s authority is required.

The interpretation of this statement becomes a bit easier if it is understood that Paul is not teaching a creation hierarchy, but a proper relationship between the sexes. It would not be odd for Paul to discuss the woman’s authority over her head, if it is recognized that she has authority. Paul already confirms that women are able to pray and give prophecy in church by not rebuking the practice. The woman, Paul says, has complete authority over her head, so she should honor it by respecting herself in creation. This means that while she has the freedom to do with her head as she pleases, she should seek to honor both God and man with her authority. This is a clear reference to verse 4-6 indicating that a woman should take authority and wear her hair up.<sup>60</sup> This reading makes the text much clearer and would harmonize an otherwise difficult to understand statement.

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<sup>57</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 519.

<sup>58</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 113.

<sup>59</sup> MacArthur, 259.

<sup>60</sup> Payne, 152.

The second difficulty in verse 10 is Paul's qualification about woman's authority being because of the angels. There are three primary views on the meaning of this statement. The first harkens back to fallen angels who are assumed to have mated with women in Genesis 6:2 to produce the Nephilim (Genesis 6:4). Payne dismisses this conclusion out of hand as a myth from I Enoch 6-19.<sup>61</sup> Another possibility is that the angels are human messengers visiting the church who are offended by the behavior they witness. This view is espoused of the angels of the churches in Revelation; however, Paul never refers to angels in this way.<sup>62</sup> The most likely conclusion is that Paul means that God's good angels are observing the Corinthian worship services. Paul includes the definite article relating to angels, and this is always used in Scripture to refer to good angels.<sup>63</sup> As praise is given to God in the worship of His people, angels are witnessing the event, and their presence makes giving offense something to be avoided. Some would argue that angels, as submissive creatures, are naturally offended by women who step outside their role of submission.<sup>64</sup> Angels as the guardians of created order are offended by any disregard for that order in worship.<sup>65</sup> This view is unlikely due to the problem of ἐξουσία in this passage, as stated above. Others believe that disrespecting the differences between the sexes, not relating to hierarchy but to creation, is offensive to angels because it is offensive to God. This seems to be the correct view, especially since Paul is not teaching about created order, but about the interdependence of individuals.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>62</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1979, reprint 1997), 42. Payne 152.

<sup>63</sup> Lockwood, page 374.

<sup>64</sup> MacArthur, 259.

<sup>65</sup> Charles H Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2003), 69.

## I Corinthians 11:11-16

Paul begins to conclude this pericope by restating his main theme: the interdependence of men and women as ordained by God. The adverb *πλήν* indicates that Paul is honing on the main teaching point of the passage, the one thing that he wanted the Corinthians to understand.<sup>66</sup> In verse 11-12, Paul states that woman is not independent of man, and man is not independent of woman. Fee sees verses 11-12 as a double chiasm with verses 8-9, underscoring the interdependence of men and women.<sup>67</sup> The obvious implication is stated in verse 12: woman came from man (Genesis 2:18, referencing back to I Corinthians 11:3), and now all men come from women through birth. Paul includes the phrase “in the Lord” in verse 11, however, to be sure that the Corinthians know he is not just speaking of physical birth, but of the interdependence of men and women. This highlights how important it is for men and women to respect one another, and to stop disgracing themselves in their appearance.

For the subordinationist, the reason Paul includes verse 11-12 is to protect against misogyny.<sup>68</sup> Even though men hold a position that gives them administration and leadership, women are indispensable and of equal worth (Galatians 3:28). In contrast, the egalitarian believes this verse is asserting the fundamental equality between men and women. The adverb *χωρίς* is typically translated as interdependent. Fiorenza quotes Joseph Kurzinger that “this translation has little basis. Usually the term means not ‘without,’ but ‘different from.’”<sup>69</sup> If this is correct, verse

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<sup>66</sup> Payne, 158.

<sup>67</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 523.

<sup>68</sup> MacArthur, 260.

<sup>69</sup> Fiorenza, 229.

11 now reads, “In the Lord, woman is not different from man, nor man from woman.”<sup>70</sup> There is an undertone of individuals no longer being understood as sexed beings in this statement, which sounds very similar to the overly realized eschatology of the Corinthians. However, Paul’s point is that there are indeed two sexes, as God created, and they should be represented properly.

Verse 13 begins Paul’s closing statement, circling back to the practices that were dishonoring in verse 4-6: should a woman pray with head uncovered? Paul appeals to the Corinthians’ own judgment on his conclusions, because he believes he has made his point convincingly.<sup>71</sup> Paul uses two rhetorical questions to reinforce his teaching, beginning with the statement that nature teaches that men should have short hair. Fee says that Paul is not a stoic appealing to nature, but that he is appealing to proper behavior that is culturally relevant.<sup>72</sup> Men in Corinth knew they should not present themselves with hair that would make people think they were homosexuals, just as in verse 15, women should not present themselves with hair that would be dishonoring to men. Paul states that a woman’s hair is given to her for a covering, which can seem to conflict with the content of 4-6; however, Payne points out that Paul is discussing proper public display of hair, so her long hair is her glory when it is done up (verse 15b), allowing for this interpretation to still make sense.<sup>73</sup> Paul finishes with the statement that if anyone wants to be contentious, Paul and his companions have no custom, nor do the other churches of God. “If anyone wishes” is a common phrase in I Corinthians, and indicates that

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Payne, 167.

<sup>72</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 527.

<sup>73</sup> Payne, 171.

people were being contentious in the church, and this was not a rhetorical exercise.<sup>74</sup> Paul then summarizes that the custom of blurring the lines of gender differences is not an accepted practice by him or churches in general.

This passage is extraordinarily difficult to interpret due to the differences in culture, and by Paul's use of terms whose meanings are obscure for the modern reader. The interpretation that makes the best sense given the context, language, and argumentation is that Paul is not teaching about authority in this passage, but about proper public conduct in worship for men and women. The Corinthian church was blurring the lines of socially acceptable behavior, and Paul rebuked this practice on the grounds that it would hurt the witness of the church in the community.

The best conclusion is that Paul's use of *κεφαλή* in this passage is to indicate "source." This makes the most sense of the passage and Paul's goal of instruction in worship. The view that Paul is teaching about creation hierarchy complicates his letter and his dialogue in an unnecessary way, especially since the only authority that Paul references in the entire passage is the authority of women in verse 10.

It also makes sense that Paul is discussing hairstyles instead of veils, as hair is used in the text of I Corinthians 11:2-16. The introduction of veils and veiling customs causes unnecessary complications, and is only done eisegetically to support subordinationist presuppositions. This view assumes cultural convictions that are unable to be substantiated in Corinth at the time. Paul's purpose of correcting practices that were dishonoring to men and God fits better with a discussion of hairstyles, because both men and women are blurring the gender distinction. Seeing the chiasmic structure of verses 8-9, 11-12 emphasizes the equality of man and women in the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.,172-173.

Lord, and shows that Paul wants women and men to understand their equality in Jesus. They should represent themselves properly, not disgracefully, in the church worship gathering.

Understanding verse 11 to say that there is no difference between men and women in the Lord underscores Paul's belief that men and women are equal in the eyes of the Lord. Paul never condemns women praying and prophesying in public worship, in a passage about this very subject. It should be clear that Paul does not find this practice to be in error. Paul's approval then, should be applied to the modern church as well, and women should not be prevented from praying or prophesying in church. As men and women are interdependent, and Paul has not established a top-down, male leadership model in this passage, the conclusion must be reached that Paul is not restricting women from performing functions in the church, but instead requiring men and women to operate out of respect for one another.

#### I Timothy 3:1-12

The Apostle Paul wrote I Timothy after he was released from his first imprisonment. Though his movements are not certain, it is likely that Paul and Timothy traveled to Ephesus and ministered for some period of time after his release.<sup>75</sup> Paul left Timothy in Ephesus as an apostolic advisor, of sorts. Timothy was not an elder in the church, but he was charged with providing leadership and spiritual oversight.<sup>76</sup> In 1:3-4, and 3:14-16, Paul gives two reasons for his writing: to rebuke heresy that had invaded the church, and to enable Timothy to teach others "how to behave in the household of God." The Ephesians were struggling with a form of Jewish legalism that was spreading through the church. This heretical teaching involved a divergent

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<sup>75</sup> Lea and Black, *The New Testament, Its Background and Message*, 472

<sup>76</sup> William D. Mounce, Ralph P. Martin, ed., Lynn A. Losie, ed., *World Biblical Commentary, vol. 46, Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 155.

sexual ethic, where marriage was shunned, godliness marginalized, and order disturbed. Paul writes, encouraging Timothy to stand on the truth and to speak out as one who was spiritually mature. Chapter 3 is the midpoint of Paul's letter. In the first chapter, Paul gives an introduction, and then launches into a missive against false teachers, and salvation in the true Gospel. In chapter 2, Paul gives instruction for church order that the Ephesians should follow, based on the issues that were occurring with false teaching in the church. Chapter 3 switches focus to the order of church leadership. Paul establishes his precedent for order from his practice in churches during his ministry.

### **I Timothy 3:1**

Verse 1 begins with Paul stating a maxim of church ministry. "This is a trustworthy saying" indicates that Paul knows he is giving an instruction that should be enacted. Some commentators see this verse looking backwards to I Timothy 2:15 where Paul was addressing the role of women in the Ephesian church. It is thought that this phrase is meant to universalize the restriction of women in ministry, and salvation by childrearing. Paul, however, is switching topics by way of a new instruction, one that is of universal application as it deals with the qualities of church leaders.<sup>77</sup> There is a noticeable change from what people should be, to what qualities they need to have in this section.<sup>78</sup>

The "trustworthy saying," is that anyone who aspires to the office of overseer desires a good work. The word translated as office is *ἐργον*, meaning work or employment. Office makes sense as a translation, because Paul is writing about the leadership positions he appoints in

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<sup>77</sup> Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 75-76.

<sup>78</sup> Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 82.

churches that he begins (Acts 14:23). In addition, Paul gives similar instructions to Titus who is serving in a different ministry context in Crete, and Paul's concern to appoint high quality elders is the same. The word translated as overseer is *ἐπισκοπή*. This is one of a few words that refer to the teaching and oversight ministry of the local church: elder, pastor, and bishop, all of which are synonymous.<sup>79</sup> Paul states that anyone who desires this office reaches for a noble task. At the outset, Paul does not limit the scope of his qualities to a specific group of people, but includes all that would want to serve.

### **I Timothy 3:2-7**

Paul moves into the qualities that he deems necessary for an overseer. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of requirements of duty, but an ad hoc list.<sup>80</sup> None of the qualities in the list is overtly Christian in nature, indicating that Paul was considering the reputation of overseers outside the church, as well as internally. The list contains one important phrase in respect to women in ministry, and that is found in 3:2 where Paul comments that the overseer should be "the husband of one wife." Many commentaries skip over this phrase, assuming that Paul means only men should be overseers, based on I Timothy 2:11-16.<sup>81</sup> The noun *ἀνὴρ* (husband/man), repeated in Titus 1:6, assumes a man is meant by this command. In addition to this, there are no undisputed examples in the New Testament of a woman serving as an elder in any church.<sup>82</sup> This argument from silence is buttressed by Paul's focus on husbands.

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<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, 694.

<sup>80</sup> Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 74.

<sup>81</sup> Mounce, Martin, and Losie, 170.

<sup>82</sup> Beck and Blomberg, 285.

Assuming that Paul gives this list for all churches, it is concluded that women should not serve in the office of elder.

Of the commentators that did address the gender restriction, there were several reasons given to conclude that God does not restrict women from eldership in this verse. The list given by Paul is a list of qualities, not a list of duties or requirements. What Paul is requiring is the quality of faithfulness to one's marriage.<sup>83</sup> In I Timothy 5:9, women enrolled on the widows list are also to be faithful to their spouses, indicating that Paul required faithfulness in marital relations for all areas of the church.<sup>84</sup> The reason why it is stated in this list as the "husband of one wife" is due to the propensity of men to be unfaithful to their wives, and also to guard against polygamy.<sup>85</sup> It is likely that in Ephesus most, if not all, elders were male. This statement is consistent with that assumption, but provides no requirement for that to be maintained.<sup>86</sup>

In addition, Paul's use of the word "anyone" in verse 1 would be a poor word choice if Paul really meant only men.<sup>87</sup> Payne points out that Paul could have restricted the role of overseer in verse 1 most naturally by stating "any man," which would make sense after his discussion in I Timothy 2:11-15.<sup>88</sup> Interpreting this verse to exclude women based on the word 'man' would also restrict non-married people from serving as elder, like Paul himself. Also, in verse 4, the elders are to manage their children; does this mean that men without children cannot

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<sup>83</sup> Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Volume 17* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 2009), 68.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Beck and Blomberg, page 43.

<sup>87</sup> Payne, 381.

<sup>88</sup> Payne, 379.

serve as elders?<sup>89</sup> It seems unlikely that Paul would require these qualities of elders, as they had no specific impact on the oversight of the church.

### **I Timothy 3:8-13**

Verse 8 addresses the office of deacon, and is introduced by the phrase “deacons, likewise...” indicating a transition. In the list of requirements for deacons, there are only two qualities that are required of elders, but not of deacons: doctrinal purity and leadership.<sup>90</sup> While the office of elder is one of church leadership, the office of deacon is one of service to the church. The main interpretive issue in this passage occurs in verse 3:11 where the “wives/women” are addressed as a separate group from the overseers and deacons. The Greek language had no word for female deacon, just the masculine “deacon” when Paul wrote this letter. This word was applied to Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2 and is an argument for her service as a full-fledged deacon in the church at Cenchreae. Commentators are divided into three main groups as to what *γυναῖκας* refers to in verse 11.

The first and traditional interpretation is that *γυνή* means the wives of deacons. The argument is that Paul is writing about deacons in verses 7-10, and then again in verses 12-13; it would be odd to break up the flow of his thought to address a new group of church leadership, and then switch immediately back.<sup>91</sup> If taken as a unit, verses 12-13 discuss the topic of family; breaking them into separate groups interrupts that flow.<sup>92</sup> Also, there is no unambiguous

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 380-381.

<sup>90</sup> Beck and Blomberg, 195.

<sup>91</sup> Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 88.

<sup>92</sup> Mounce, Martin, and Losie, 203.

reference to women serving in the office of deacon in the New Testament.<sup>93</sup> In this view, the prohibition in verse 12, as well as in Acts 6:3, would restrict the office of deacon to men.

The second view argues that verse 11 introduces a new group of church servants, the role of deaconess. Payne is careful to distinguish “female deacon” from “deaconess.” The term deaconess is first found in the third century.<sup>94</sup> The restrictions of 2:11-15, where women were not allowed to teach or have authority over a man, are seen as universal, so a woman in this role cannot have the same clout as her male counterpart.<sup>95</sup> Since women were not able to serve in the official office, there must then be a third group, deaconesses. One argument against this position (used by those in the deacons wives camp also) asks why Paul would invent a word for deaconess if he really wanted there to be a third office in church administration.<sup>96</sup> Otherwise, this conclusion is largely based on a systematic analysis of scripture that reads hierarchy as a creation ordinance, not on the text itself.

The third view is that verse 11 is addressing women serving in the office of deacon. Payne states that ancient interpreters nearly all recognized this verse as referring to women serving in this capacity.<sup>97</sup> In this view, verses 8-10 would contain general principles for all deacons, verse 11 would contain specific instructions for female deacons, and verse 12 would contain specific instructions for male deacons. While the awkward insertion of verse 11 goes against this view, the introduction of the group of female deacons in verse 11 is the same as the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Aime Georges Martimort, K.D Whitehead, translator, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 36.

<sup>95</sup> Jouette M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 70

<sup>96</sup> Mounce, Martin, and Losie, 203.

<sup>97</sup> Payne, 386.

introduction of requirements for deacons (v.8). The “likewise” instruction would be unnecessary if Paul was continuing to discuss the wives of deacons.<sup>98</sup> The lack of a possessive for γυναῖκας in verse 11 argues against the idea that Paul has deacons’ wives in view. The possessive for wives would be expected if he is talking about “their” wives.<sup>99</sup>

There are a few conclusions that can be drawn from this passage in regards to women in ministry. The first is that Paul considered “anyone” desiring the office of overseer as a good thing. It would be very strange in a passage that is universalized by its introduction to specifically limit the scope of application after the fact. Payne shows that there are no explicitly male terms in this list of qualities, though the English translation indicates otherwise.<sup>100</sup> The lack of specifics, while an argument from silence, makes the most sense if Paul is listing generic qualities for the offices of elder and deacon. The phrases that state “husband of one wife” should not be understood to limit the offices to just men, but to address the issue of faithfulness in marriage. In the context of the letter, and universal instruction to the church during this time period, it makes sense that the restriction is directed at men, as they were the most likely to be unfaithful or polygamous. Verse 11 introduces a subclass of deacons, the female deacons, and points out specific qualities that they should possess, likely because these were areas where they would struggle more than the male deacons. Verse 12, likewise, points out the areas where male deacons would need special instructions. This passage does not restrict the service of women from the office of elder or deacon.

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<sup>98</sup> R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus, To Guard the Deposit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000, reprinted 2012), page 140.

<sup>99</sup> Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 88.

<sup>100</sup> Payne, 379.

## Genesis 3:16

Genesis 3:16 summarizes the punishment of God on Eve for the sin she committed in the Garden. The first half of the verse deals with the pain women would have to endure during childbirth, and the second half contributes to the discussion of the role of women in the church. Verse 3:16b states “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” The traditional interpretation of this text would elevate the husband above the wife in authority (Genesis 2:18, 22).<sup>101</sup> The pre-existing hierarchy is re-enforced in Genesis 3:16, and exacerbated to make it burdensome. The woman’s desire is corrupted, and with it the desire of all women from this time forward. This argument is critical to the discussion of hierarchy in I Corinthians 11:2-16, and I Timothy 2:11-16, as Paul references these events. The conclusion that there was a pre-existent hierarchy in this text comes from interpreting “helper” in Genesis 2:18 and the creation of woman from man in Genesis 2:22 as proof of the subordination of women to men.

Inferiority, however, is not a quality inherent in the word “helper” in verse 18, but must be ascribed to it. The Hebrew *‘ezer* is used of any helper and does not denote inferiority to the one being helped.<sup>102</sup> Secondly, understanding that a woman is subject to a man because she was brought forth from him reads hierarchy into a text that is not warranted. Instead, the order of creation (man first) and the substance of creation (man’s rib) should lead one to the conclusion woman was man’s partner, not his subordinate.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 222.

<sup>102</sup> Pierce and Groothuis, 86.

<sup>103</sup> Payne, 31-32.

The best understanding of verse 16 is that God established a punishment for women by placing her under man's authority. The punishments given to the serpent, the man, and the woman were all things that were not God ordained at Creation, so man's authority over women would fall in the same vein. Payne draws the conclusion that if Genesis 3:16 teaches hierarchy after the fall, we should fight against this punishment, as we do against pain in childbirth and the difficulty in earning a living from the ground. Instead of working to lessen these other punishments, the correct equivalency of the hierarchy imposed after the Fall would be to increase them.<sup>104</sup> The best conclusion of Genesis 3:16 is that it does not reinforce the hierarchy implicit in Genesis 2:18, 22. The text speaks of the corruption of the desire of woman, not of a trait to be modeled.

#### Romans 16:1-7

In Romans 16, the Apostle Paul is concluding his letter to the church in Rome. Paul is proceeding from didactic material to the letter's conclusion with greetings to individuals in the church. Paul mentions 26 people in his list of greetings, and of those 9 are women. Three of those women are germane to this discussion of women in leadership: Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia.

Phoebe was greeted as a sister, and a *διάκονος*, meaning servant from the church at Cenchreae. Paul commended Phoebe to the church at Rome as she was most likely carrying his letter to them, and he wanted the church to receive her as one of their own.<sup>105</sup> The word *διάκονος* is the same word translated as servant or deacon, and could describe the office or function of

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>105</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 272.

deacon in the New Testament church. Traditional commentators believe it is too early in the development of the church to have an established “office” of deacon that Phoebe would be filling.<sup>106</sup> Payne argued that *διάκονος* was better translated as “minister” in Romans, and that the participle *οὔσαν* is best understood as referring to the office of deacon in the church at Cenchreae.<sup>107</sup> Payne also pointed out that *πράγματι*, translated as succourer in the KJV and patron in the ESV, is best understood as a woman leader (ruler).<sup>108</sup> The evidence suggests that whether or not the “office” of deacon existed at this point in time, Paul was comfortable with Phoebe serving in a leadership capacity.

Paul had a long relationship with Priscilla and Aquila, having met them in Corinth (Acts 18:2), brought them with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), and left them in Ephesus where they ministered, most notably to Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). The primary argument for Priscilla’s leadership is based on the ordering of her and her husband’s names. It would be customary for a man (Aquila) to be listed first and his wife listed second, as in Acts 18:2. In Romans 16, and in II Timothy 4:19, Paul lists Prisca (Priscilla) first against convention. Some believe this means that she was the primary teacher or more important partner in the couple. Payne draws the conclusion that she was at least a teacher, if not the dominant teacher in the couple.<sup>109</sup> MacArthur, however, makes the point that there is no specific conclusion that one can draw from the ordering of Priscilla and Aquila.<sup>110</sup> Paul and Luke list the names with both Priscilla and Aquila in the first

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<sup>106</sup> Douglas J. Moo *The Epistle to the Romans*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), 914.

<sup>107</sup> Payne, 49-50.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Payne, 50-51.

<sup>110</sup> MacArthur, 363.

position. Drawing any conclusion other than the fact that Priscilla was a laborer and a teacher goes beyond the biblical content.

Junia is the most difficult name in the list to derive meaning for. The first problem with Junia is discerning the gender behind the name. Moo explained that from the thirteenth to the mid twentieth century, Junia was considered to be Junias, a male name contracted from Junianus.<sup>111</sup> The earliest reference to this conclusion appears to be Epiphanius in the fourth century.<sup>112</sup> However, most early and current scholars identify Junia as a woman. There exists no evidence for the name Junias being used as a shortened form of Junianus, and Junia was a very common name for a woman.<sup>113</sup> Andronicus, whose name precedes Junia, is considered by most commentators to be her husband. Payne pointed out that there is no clear evidence that Andronicus was a man, so that conclusion may be in error.<sup>114</sup>

After properly identifying Junia's gender, the next question is what is Paul saying about her? Is he saying that she was "an esteemed apostle," or that she was "esteemed by the apostles"? Stott said that the underlying Greek is unclear so drawing too firm a conclusion is not wise, but he favored "esteemed by the apostles."<sup>115</sup> However, as Moo points out, the most natural reading is "esteemed among the apostles,"<sup>116</sup> and Epp concluded that Junia was clearly an apostle on Paul's level of apostleship.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Moo, 922.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Payne, 52.

<sup>115</sup> John R. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World (Bible Speaks Today)* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Academic Press, 2001), 396.

<sup>116</sup> Moo, 923.

Regardless of what Paul meant, the context of this passage makes it impossible to derive a clear teaching regarding these women and the roles in which they served alongside Paul. Though their specific roles and responsibilities are not discernable, the conclusion can be reached that Paul was comfortable with each woman serving in important roles in the church. Paul does not rebuke or correct the ways they have served, but praises them for their contributions.

#### I Corinthians 14:34-35

This passage of Scripture reinforces the idea that women were not to have authority in the church. At face value it teaches that women should not even speak; they should learn quietly, asking their husbands for instruction at home. Verse 35 also makes it plain that a woman speaking would be considered dishonorable. Complementarians rarely see this restriction as an absolute call for silence from women, but there is not universal consensus on the restrictions Paul is calling for. There is always some nuance in interpreting this passage.<sup>118</sup>

The most reasonable interpretation of these verses is that they are an interpolation. A scribe most likely moved a gloss from the margin of the text into the main body of the letter. This content creates interpretive challenges as it causes a contradiction in Paul's teaching from 11:2-16. In I Corinthians 11:5, Paul gave direction for how women should act when they prayed or prophesied in the church setting. If this passage restricts the ability of women to speak in church completely, Paul would be contradicting himself. The passage does not fit the flow of Paul's instructions. Hays noted this and stated it would be hard to imagine Paul writing

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<sup>117</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia, The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis, MN, Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 70, 79-81.

<sup>118</sup> Barrett, 332.

something allowing for women to speak in chapter 11, and then writing that it was shameful for them to do so a few paragraphs later.<sup>119</sup>

Secondly, the passage's location in the text is inconsistent. Even though the verses appear in all manuscripts, where they are found has changed. Typically in Western manuscripts, the passages follows verse 33; however, in other texts, the passage follows after verse 40.<sup>120</sup> This makes sense if the text was a marginal gloss that was added after Paul wrote the letter.<sup>121</sup> If the content was present in the original letter, it would be unthinkable (and beyond the scope of a scribe's work) to relocate a piece of text that large. Fee wrote that "while these two verses exist in all known manuscripts...the two text-critical criteria of transcriptional and intrinsic probability combine to cast considerable doubt on their authenticity."<sup>122</sup> In addition, there is manuscript evidence in Codex Fuldensis and Codex Vaticanus indicating that the passage has textual problems. There are also a high number of textual variants that occur in these verses, which is common with interpolations.<sup>123</sup>

A third argument for interpolation is the text itself. The restriction to not permit women to speak closely parallels I Timothy 2:11. Hultgren stated, "The structure suggests an interpolation by retrospection from I Timothy 2:11f, where the same verb '(not) to permit'

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<sup>119</sup> Richard B. Hays *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 246.

<sup>120</sup> Payne, 188-189.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, page 699.

<sup>123</sup> Payne, 203.

appears...clearly referring to a prior decision...of which there is not the slightest trace here.”<sup>124</sup>

In addition, the appeal to “the Law” in this case requires a limitation on the Christian’s behavior from the Old Testament, which Paul makes in no other place. There is also no clear prohibition in the Old Testament that this refers to. Payne argues that it would be difficult to reconcile this view with Paul’s other writings.<sup>125</sup>

### I Timothy 2:11-15

This passage must be considered one of the key texts restricting women from leadership in the church. The context of this passage is Paul’s instruction to the Ephesian church about church order. As shown above, the main purpose in leaving Timothy in Ephesus was to combat the teaching of false doctrine (I Timothy 1:3-7). Paul begins practical instruction in Chapter Two, beginning with prayer, and moving into proper adornment, and finally the role of women in the church. It is important to note that Paul was teaching about Ephesus here specifically, so all conclusions on practical application stem from the context of the Ephesian church.

In verse 11 Paul says, “a woman should learn quietly, with all submission.” This statement highlights a problem in Timothy’s sphere of influence: women were apparently fanning the flames of heretical teachings. This conclusion is drawn from I Timothy 4:3, and I Timothy 5:11-15.<sup>126</sup> “A woman” is a generic noun, which could represent any woman in Ephesus engaged in false teaching.<sup>127</sup> The prohibition that Paul gives makes logical sense: women in Ephesus are spreading false teaching, therefore women should learn in quietness with

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<sup>124</sup> Arlen J. Hultgren, and Roger Aus, *Augsburg New Testament Commentary I-II Timothy, Titus, II Thessalonians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1984), 242.

<sup>125</sup> Payne, 206-208.

<sup>126</sup> Payne, 247.

<sup>127</sup> Mounce, Martin, and Losie, 117-118.

all submission. The word “in quietness” most likely refers to an attitude of the spirit of “a woman” in learning, not a requirement that she should be silent.<sup>128</sup> Paul does not specify to whom “all submission” refers to in the text, but it can be inferred that he means those who are teaching authoritatively.

Verse 12 states that Paul “does not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” Payne and Fee argue that this was a time-limited prohibition based on the verb tense of “permit.” Fee states that a better translation would be “am not now permitting” reflecting the thought behind Paul’s command better than the finite “I am not permitting” in English.<sup>129</sup> Payne argues persuasively that Paul never universalizes this command. There are no universal qualifiers in this passage, limiting the scope of application to the women at Ephesus.<sup>130</sup> The word translated “have authority” is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, so it is difficult to be certain, but its meaning is most likely closer to “usurp authority” (as in the KJV). This indicates that the problematic action of the women is not just their having authority, but claiming authority that they should not have had.

Verses 13-14 are connected to verses 11-12, as they explain Paul’s prohibition: the women in Ephesus were deceived, just as Eve was deceived. Paul is not condemning the nature of women, but giving an example that will illustrate his point. There is nothing in the text to conclude that Paul was establishing a hierarchical subordination of woman to man based on

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<sup>128</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles (The New International Greek Commentary)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2013), 139 sees this as literal silence; however Fee *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 72, Payne, 262, and Mounce, Marting, and Losie, 118-119 favor quietness of spirit: not seeking to be in charge, but to learn.

<sup>129</sup> Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, page 72

<sup>130</sup> Payne, 265-267.

creation, but rather that the specific women of Ephesus must respect men.<sup>131</sup> Paul uses Eve as a representative woman to illustrate how the women in Ephesus were sharing false doctrine with men, just as Eve shared the forbidden fruit with Adam.<sup>132</sup>

Verse 15 concludes the instruction by stating that the woman will be saved through childbirth and living righteously. Paul's reference ties directly to his discussion of Eve as a representative of the women in Ephesus promoting heresy. Paul's statement continues the example of the Fall narrative, concluding that women would be saved by "the childbirth," meaning Christ's birth.<sup>133</sup> This maintains the unity of Paul's theology of salvation by faith apart from works, maintains the unity of passage, and is most intelligible given Paul's objective in rebuking the situation in Ephesus. Salvation through Christ will manifest itself in the virtues Paul concludes verse 15 with: "faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."

In its totality, this passage teaches that Paul placed restrictions on women from teaching and usurping authority over men in Ephesus due to a struggle the church was facing with false teaching spread through women in the church. The prohibition is not universal.

### **My Personal Practice and Belief**

Before entering into this project, I was a moderate complementarian. I believed that men and women were equal in the eyes of the Lord in regards to salvation and value, but that God had created an established hierarchy of service. Men were meant to be elders, and women were allowed in all other areas of service. After doing the study for this project, my view has changed

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, page 74

<sup>133</sup> Payne, 371.

to an egalitarian understanding of leadership. Grudem says, “Not all egalitarians are liberals, but all liberals are egalitarians.”<sup>134</sup> That phrase seems to cast aspersions on those who come to a biblically-based conclusion that egalitarianism is what Paul desired for the church. My belief, however, is that conservative scholarship seeks to honor the truth of the written word, not just accepting traditional conclusions to theological questions because they are well established. This belief impacts my ministry practices in four areas.

I believe that Paul establishes two offices in the church: elder and deacon. In I Timothy 3:1, 7 Paul discusses the leadership requirements for these two leadership roles. The office of elder was established to administer and govern the church in relationship to authority, doctrinal purity, and teaching. The office of deacon was established to serve the local congregation by meeting needs and partnering in ministry (like Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2). In the New Testament, the office of elder is synonymous with pastor, teacher, and bishop. One of the arguments against Pauline authorship of I Timothy was due to the overly developed ecclesiology found in I Timothy 3; however, the wide acceptance of this letter, coupled with the practice of Paul in Acts 14:23 of appointing elders “in every church,” establishes the biblical pattern of leadership very early on in the churches’ development. In addition, the establishment of the seven men appointed to serve in Acts 6:1-7 was the forerunner of a diaconate focused on meeting the needs of the people. This separation of responsibilities provides for the care of both the spiritual (elders) and physical (deacons) needs of the local church.

The offices of elder and deacon should be open to both men and women. In I Timothy 2:11-15, Paul does not establish a universal prohibition for women teaching or leading in the local church. At that specific time and place, Paul restricted women from teaching and usurping

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<sup>134</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism, A New Path to Liberalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books), 29

authority. This specific restriction against “usurping authority” does not mean that women can never have authority over men. There is nothing latent in the creation account of Genesis 2:18, 22 or Genesis 3:16. I Corinthians 14:34-45 does not give didactic instruction, because it was an interpolation. For deacons, Paul in I Timothy 3:11 instructs the *γυνή* in the same way that he instructs the elders and male deacons. The conclusion that *γυνή* means “deacons’ wives,” does not fit the sentence structure and would be odd since there were no special instructions to the elders’ wives. In addition, the lack of the possessive “their” in Greek would also argue against that meaning. It seems less likely that these are a sub-class of deacons, rather than full-fledged deacons.

The role of the deacon as seen in Acts 6:1-6 was to minister to the congregation by assisting the elders in meeting the practical needs of the people. It is true that Acts 6:3 says to appoint *άνήρ* (men) to serve, but the church culture in Jerusalem was much different than other places the church would expand. The Book of Acts contains descriptive events, not always prescriptive commands. In contrast, Paul universalized his teaching on elders and deacons in I Timothy 3:1 by his statement of “this is a trustworthy saying,” and his practices seen in the churches he began. As the church expanded, it can be seen in I Timothy that needs arose among women that would be inappropriate for men to handle. The deacons (female), however, would be able to minister to women in this way by serving in this role. While Romans 16:1-2 does not say enough about the roles of Phoebe and Junia to establish their roles fully, Paul’s commendation and description of Phoebe as a *διάκονος* without qualification shows that he trusted her to serve and minister alongside him, as she is seen being a “patron of many, including myself.” In his writings and his practice, Paul established the service of women in equality with men in the offices of elder and deacon.

The New Testament does not limit the scope of women to teach and instruct in the local church. There are two main passages that discuss the ability of women to teach in the New Testament: I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-15. I Corinthians 14:34-35 is likely an interpolation copied into the text at a later time. The interpolation markings in Codex Vaticanus and the manuscript evidence in Codex Fuldenses are very compelling evidence to conclude that these two verses were not written by Paul. The striking similarity to I Timothy 2:11-15 also makes it likely that it was added after the original composition. With that established, the primary limiting verse on women teaching is I Timothy 2:11-15. The term translated “exercise authority over” in the ESV is a *hapax legomenon*, so knowing precisely what Paul meant is difficult, however the most logical conclusion is that Paul was arguing against women unjustly usurping authority over men, as the KJV renders this verse. Irrespective of this, the context of the letter addresses the specific situation in the Ephesian church, and no other text would lead to the conclusion that it was a permanent or universal prohibition.

The New Testament does not limit the scope of women in authority any more that it limits any other non-elder in the local church. The main passage limiting the authority of women in the church is I Timothy 2:11-15, and the scope of this prohibition was limited to the context of the Ephesian church. Paul never makes a universalizing statement in this passage; his focus was squarely on the local situation and struggles that Timothy was facing in Ephesus. There is, however, a universal principle that is found in I Timothy 2:11-15: submission to the authorities placed over the local church. While the details of the Ephesian church are unique, the struggles of all churches mirror them in some way. In the local church, it is not acceptable to claim undelegated authority, or to cause division due to contentiousness.

## **Conclusion**

The topic of women in ministry tends to be divisive in nature. Complementarians and egalitarians have strong, reasoned, and biblical arguments for their belief systems, and the practices that are ingrained in the church reinforce those belief systems. As this project has shown, analyzing the biblical texts using recent scholarship and exegesis can cause people to change their minds. As a Christian, our calling is to examine what we believe to ensure that it always lines up with what Scripture says. This project has also shown that the application and alignment of practice to belief is critical because Christianity is not primarily a philosophical exercise, but an outworking of the core beliefs of an individual to be more like Christ. Lastly, this project emphasizes the need to hold our secondary convictions loosely. While there is a “right” answer in the debate between complementarians and egalitarians, the unity of the Church is more important than finding that answer.

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