

# *The Future of Leadership at Bent Tree*

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A Statement from the Board of Elders  
Bent Tree Bible Fellowship  
April 2016



## Foreword

On an otherwise ordinary morning in Jerusalem, the disciples were gathered together when the Spirit came upon them in tongues of fire. They were all filled with the Spirit of God and started to speak in the languages of other nations. *With the dawn of a new day, came the dawning of a new era.* The church was born. As they spilled into the streets, they encountered pilgrims from the far reaches of the known world, in town for the festival, who gathered around them, perplexed by the strange sound. These Galileans were speaking languages they had never learned, and those who heard those languages were hearing the gospel for the first time. They asked each other, “What does this mean?”<sup>1</sup> Others wondered if the speakers were drunk, and confusion began to spread through the streets. So, Peter stood up to make the first address of the Christian church.

After pointing out the absurdity of the accusation of intoxication (it was only 9 a.m.), Peter quoted the Prophet Joel to explain the events of the day:

*“In the last days,” God says, “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.”*<sup>2</sup>

Joel’s prediction had come true. With the dawning of the new day (“in the last days”), everyone in Christ received the Spirit and was included in God’s work. This apparently also included women and slaves (the Greek word is *doulos*, a slave completely subservient to his or her master), which was a revolutionary notion. In this new day, women were included in functions previously reserved for men. The social distinctions that once ruled service and leadership had been transformed at the cross. The rest of the New Testament shows the inclusion of women actively exercising their spiritual gifts in church ministry, demonstrating the timeless message of Acts 2 at work.

For the last 2000 years, the church has been trying to figure out exactly how this works. For the last 24 years, the elders of Bent Tree have joined the conversation, and the result has been a distinctive called *Shared Leadership*.

A distinctive is more than a value. It is something that is characteristic of the culture of an organization or family. Bent Tree’s distinctives are part of our collective DNA and are what cause people to say things like, “That feels like Bent Tree.” Our five distinctives are: The Indwelling Christ, Grace Lived Out, Biblical Teaching, World Missions, and *Shared Leadership*. In our documents, our *Shared Leadership* distinctive is described this way:

*Shared Leadership means that we believe all believers are equipped with spiritual gifts that are given by the Lord for the express purpose of building up the church. These gifts are given irrespective of age, gender, race, background, or experience and it is our conviction that these gifts be used fully for leadership and ministry. In some traditions, the roles of leadership and teaching have been reserved for men. This is not the case at*

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2:12

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:17–18, NIV (emphasis added)

*Bent Tree. Here, women are encouraged to exercise their gifts freely for the edification of the church.*

This is almost completely true of us, but not quite. Bent Tree is blessed to have gifted women serving on our senior leadership team, pastoral staff and preaching team, and many of our sisters in Christ have exercised their leadership gift to great benefit among us. However, the role of elder at Bent Tree has been reserved only for men, creating a disconnect between this dream of shared leadership and the simple reality that a stained-glass ceiling is leaving our church with underutilized female leaders.

Bent Tree's Board of Elders over a year ago set out together on a journey after the heart of God concerning the future of leadership in his church. Specifically, the Board wanted to know whether God was calling women to the role of elder at Bent Tree—to true *shared leadership*. After careful study, reflection, discussion, and prayer, we have unanimously come to the conclusion that God is calling us to be a community of faith committed to conservative theology and a community where women gifted by the Spirit experience no limits or restrictions on their service. We joyfully agree to invite women to *share leadership* as elders.

## The Process

In the spring of 2015, the Board met and decided to closely study the biblical treatment of women in leadership. Each elder set out separately in his study of the Bible, as well as books and articles that offered varying points of view and arguments. The rationale behind this step was to allow each individual the necessary time and space to read deeply and allow the Holy Spirit to guide his decision. Each man came from a different background and set of life experiences—from deeply complementarian to egalitarian upbringings and places in between. We were cognizant that traditions inform presuppositions, so we entered this study with open hands and receptive hearts.

In the midst of this study, the elders met periodically to discuss what each was learning and how each one was growing from this shared experience. What developed from this process was the type of growth and unity that we understood as the leading of the Holy Spirit. Later in the year, each elder was asked to prepare, in writing, an explanation of his journey, a decision on the question at hand, and the reasoning behind that decision. This would prevent “groupthink” at voting time and ensure that each of us had heard from the Lord. We were seeking clear leadership from the Spirit for our church, and we received it.

Late in 2015, at an evening elder meeting, the elders came together, curious to see how the Spirit would lead. After months of reading, prayer, and discussion, each one read his prepared statement. As the decisions were read around the table, a growing sense of anticipation filled the room. As each statement was read, enthusiastic support for women elders was declared until a unanimous decision had been made on the subject of opening the Board of Elders to women. It was a defining moment for our church and a precious moment of unity for our elders. The elders did not make this decision quickly or take it lightly. We are thrilled that the Spirit has led us to this place and look forward to seeing God move through our women leaders in new ways.

Whereas it is impossible to exhaustively address the discussion of women in leadership in a paper of this nature, the elders believe it is important to communicate the scriptural and hermeneutical support for our decision. The remainder of this paper will concisely explain our theological and biblical perspective.

## Biblical Inerrancy

Before discussing the specific passages pursuant to this dialog, the elders want to clearly state our commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture. Inerrancy simply means that there were no errors in the original manuscripts of the biblical text. We have a conservative view of Scripture because God wrote it, and he doesn’t make mistakes.<sup>3</sup> As a church, we rest in the knowledge that God cannot change, be wrong, or lie.<sup>4</sup> God’s Word is foundational truth.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Scripture becomes our touchstone when we deal with difficult issues and tough questions. While various denominations and individual churches may disagree on the question and execution of shared leadership between the genders, we can agree that

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16–17

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 6:17-18

<sup>5</sup> John 17:17

God is same yesterday, today, and tomorrow and that his Word will indelibly remain forever.

In his book on views about the millennium, Darrell Bock said this about biblical approaches to women in leadership:

*[T]he women’s debate centers not just on individual texts, but on how various kinds of texts relate to each other. That is, the Scripture has texts that affirm the rights of women in an unqualified way, along with texts that describe them as engaged in various practices, but it also has passages that affirm restriction of practice. The crucial question becomes which passages control the discussion: the passages where no limits seem to be expressed or those that do. Different sides take different positions based on whether they regard the nonrestrictive texts to be more fundamental to determining the view or the restrictive texts.”<sup>6</sup>*

The elders came to the conclusion that the texts that affirm the rights of women in unqualified ways control the discussion. Starting with a clear understanding of this dawning called the New Covenant, moving to the biblical view of women in general, then studying the passages specific to women in leadership, before addressing the specific passages on this question, allowed us to keep the larger picture in mind as we grappled with specific passages.

We do not claim that this discussion is cut-and-dried. The fact that brilliant, Spirit-filled scholars committed to the inerrancy of Scripture land on both sides of this question points to the complexity of the challenge. So we will respect anyone who disagrees with us. We do believe, however, that the discussion of women in leadership is a secondary doctrinal issue. *Primary issues* deal with the essentials of the faith: Scripture, the Trinity, the unique roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and God’s plan of salvation through Christ. Scripture is categorically clear on these issues. But there are issues that are not emphatically clear and that lend themselves to robust discussion and debate. The doctrinal positions concerning the end times, the spiritual gift of tongues, modes of baptism, particulars about the Lord’s Supper, and women in ministry would be examples of this category. Our conviction for years at Bent Tree has been:

*In essentials, unity.  
In nonessentials, liberty.  
In everything, love.*

The purpose of this paper is not to champion an agenda or even advance the debate. The purpose of this paper is to examine the question for Bent Tree through the lens of the New Covenant and decide how best to continue the mission of Bent Tree—to be used by God as he transforms people into disciples of Jesus Christ, here and around the world—based on that examination.

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<sup>6</sup> *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, Darrell L. Bock, General Editor, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1999, p. 280

## The New Covenant

The New Covenant is the context in which we live. It is inaugurated and realized in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus made peace for us with God through his blood on the cross, reconciling us, presenting us before his Father as holy, blameless, and beyond reproach.<sup>7</sup> He took us to the cross with him, and our old self was crucified and buried with him. Then, when Jesus rose from the dead, he made it possible for us to live a new life. In the moment we trust Jesus for salvation, all of this work at the cross is applied to us, and we are raised to new life, to live in the realities of the New Covenant.<sup>8</sup> Living in union with Christ and responding to the indwelling Spirit is the substance of the New Covenant. As each new day begins, we wake up as New Covenant believers, living out the blessings of this new Life in Christ.

## How the New Covenant Changes Our View of Women

The New Covenant brought new attitudes and customs concerning the intrinsic value and beneficial involvement of all ethnicities, socio-economic levels, and specifically, for our discussion, women. Like everything else in the New Covenant, this centers around Jesus.

In Jesus's day the prevailing cultural attitudes toward women were appalling. One well-known ancient text, Sirach 25:19-26, demonstrates these attitudes:

*19 There is hardly an evil like that in a woman; may she fall to the lot of the sinner!*

*20 Like a sandy hill to aged feet is a garrulous wife to a quiet husband.*

*21 Do not be enticed by a woman's beauty, or be greedy for her wealth.*

*22 Harsh is the slavery and great the shame when a wife supports her husband.*

*23 Depressed mind, gloomy face, and a wounded heart—a wicked woman.*

*Drooping hands and quaking knees, any wife who does not make her husband happy.*

*24 With a woman sin had a beginning, and because of her we all die.*

*25 Allow water no outlet, and no boldness of speech to a wicked woman.*

*26 If she does not go along as you direct, cut her away from you.*

The testimony of a woman was disregarded.<sup>9</sup> And yet Jesus told a parable about a widow beseeching an unrighteous judge for relief,<sup>10</sup> and women were chosen to be the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Men were not even permitted to speak to women in public. And yet Jesus spoke truth publicly to the woman at the well in Samaria.<sup>12</sup> Jesus had women in his traveling group, and his treatment, approval, and recognition of women were nothing less than culturally radical. So the night Jesus treated Mary as a disciple, allowing her to learn at his feet, was a watershed moment for women and a strong message to the church.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Colossians 1:19-22

<sup>8</sup> Romans 6:1-10

<sup>9</sup> Mishna: Rosh Hashanah 1:8

<sup>10</sup> Luke 18:1-8

<sup>11</sup> John 20; Matthew 28; Mark 16

<sup>12</sup> John 4:1-42

<sup>13</sup> Luke 10:38-41

As New Covenant believers who know that we entered into a new reality at the cross, we elders wondered how this New Covenant impacts our view of women in ministry. Enjoying the freedom of the New Covenant that arrived at Christ's death and exploded in panorama with his resurrection, we constantly appraise the things to which we are *no longer* subject and discard them as we cling to Christ and Christ alone.

In the Old Testament, we find the words "*no longer*" repeatedly in the context of God's change of direction or the declaration of a new day. God tells Abraham that his name shall *no longer* be Abram, since he would become a father of many nations.<sup>14</sup> God tells Israel that his name shall *no longer* be Jacob, since he strived with God and prevailed.<sup>15</sup> When his mother could hide Moses *no longer*, she placed him in a basket by the Nile.<sup>16</sup> God directed Nehemiah to rebuild the wall so that his people would *no longer* be a reproach.<sup>17</sup>

The phrase is used in the same way in the New Testament. Jesus tells his disciples that the world will *no longer* see him, but that his disciples will see him, giving them life also because he lives.<sup>18</sup> His voice tells us that what God has cleansed, *no longer* consider unholy.<sup>19</sup> We find in Jesus that we are *no longer* slaves to sin, but have been freed from it.<sup>20</sup> We are further reassured that we went to the cross with Jesus, hung there with him, and *no longer* live, but it is Christ who lives in us.<sup>21</sup> We learn that, now that faith has come, we are *no longer* under the law's tutelage.<sup>22</sup> We are *no longer* slaves, but adopted as sons.<sup>23</sup> We are *no longer* strangers and aliens, but made citizens and saints.<sup>24</sup>

Most importantly, however, we learn that the finish line and the grand banquet of the Christian faith is a place where there is *no longer* mourning, crying, pain, or death. Why? Because Christ is making all things new.<sup>25</sup>

These New Covenant "*no longer*s" are radical. So, in keeping with this newness, could it be that social distinctions and restrictions are *no longer* a part of the church, even if they once ruled the cultures and religious institutions of old? Specifically, is there hope in the New Covenant that women could be equal to men in every way, *no longer* powerless and considered to be secondary? Paul answers this question with an emphatic "yes" in Galatians 3:26-28:

*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 17:5

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 32:28

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 2:3

<sup>17</sup> Nehemiah 2:17

<sup>18</sup> John 16:16

<sup>19</sup> Acts 10:15

<sup>20</sup> Romans 6:5-7

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>22</sup> Galatians 3:25

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 4:7

<sup>24</sup> Ephesians 2:19

<sup>25</sup> Revelation 21:3-5

<sup>26</sup> Galatians 3:26-28, NASB

The obvious question here is this: Why was this attitude toward slaves, Gentiles, and women not clearly pronounced from the days before the cross? The people of God were living in a fallen world with ingrained cultural mores that required a delicate progression toward freedom. If Jesus had preached “free all the slaves,” the Romans would have snuffed him out, and he would have gone down in history as a martyr for civil rights, muddying the water of his mission. But Jesus and the apostles carefully started moving the discussion toward liberty as they slowly, almost methodically, introduced new freedoms.

In Ephesians 2, Paul argues that Christ has destroyed the “dividing wall” between Jew and Gentile. This would have been a powerful metaphor for anyone living in Jerusalem, since there was a literal wall at the temple that kept Gentiles out of the temple proper. But there was also a physical dividing wall between men and women in the temple. Walls divided the temple between the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Women, where Jewish men and women could both enter, but a Gentile could not. The Court of the Women was as far as women could go into the temple; Jewish men alone could go farther. Jesus began destroying that dividing wall between man and woman in life through personal contact and completed it in death through the blood of the New Covenant, as described by the radical statement in Galatians 3.

## The Indwelling Christ

How does the amazing truth that Jesus indwells all believers impact this discussion? If it is true that he indwells both men and women, and if it is true that any ministry of eternal value is ministry accomplished by Jesus “doing it through us,” isn’t the Jesus who lives in female believers equal in weight and authority to the Jesus who lives in male believers such that they can both serve in leadership roles? In John 15, Jesus taught us how ministry fruit would be produced in his new indwelling reality. Specifically, it is *no longer* us doing ministry, but Christ through us:

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.<sup>27</sup>*

Reading the New Testament, one will discover men and women through whom Jesus produced fruit. He does not discriminate between male and female branches. We believe that Christ does his fruit-producing work, including leadership in his church, through people of all races and every social status, through both genders and all ages. In first-century Jerusalem, one had to be an older, Jewish man to be in leadership. *No longer*. Now, anyone indwelled by the Spirit of Christ and gifted to lead is free—and called—to do so.

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<sup>27</sup> John 15:4-5, NASB



## Five Overarching Biblical Principles

With the freedom and life of the New Covenant in mind and Scripture in hand, we discovered some timeless truths that informed our decision to invite women to the elder circle.

### **1. *The New Covenant restores God's Creation intent that men and women operate collaboratively in ministry.***

In the Garden, God designed man to work in conjunction with woman, arm in arm, in mutuality, partnership and servanthood in obedience to him.<sup>28</sup> He intended for men and women to work cooperatively.<sup>29</sup> This beautiful partnership was destroyed at the Fall, and competition for power replaced it.<sup>30</sup> In Genesis 3:16, God says to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." The word "desire" can mean sexual desire or desire to rule over. In Genesis 4:7, the only other time Moses uses the word in Genesis, "sin" is personified as crouching at the door "desiring" (same word) Cain in order to devour him. Obviously, this is not sexual desire, but a desire to control for one's own purpose. For the first time in their lives, Adam and Eve were tempted to rule or have mastery over one another, and the result was disastrous.

This power struggle has been a part of humankind since the very beginning. But the effects associated with sin and broken trust were not designed to be permanent.<sup>31</sup> In fact, Christ came to reverse the relational impacts of the Fall and restore us to intimate union with God and communion with one another. In Christ, healing of the fractured partnership relationship is offered. The sexes are not independent of one another, physically or spiritually.<sup>32</sup> The same God works all things and all ministries in all persons, and the Holy Spirit manifests himself through people of both genders.<sup>33</sup> God wishes explicitly that there be no division.<sup>34</sup> We, as members of the body, are to rejoice at the honor received by any member of the body, without regard to gender.<sup>35</sup> The praise Paul freely dispensed in the New Testament to women like Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodia, and Syntyche (among others) points to a partnership between both genders permeating the early church.

### **2. *In Christ, we are to boldly reflect the redemptive movement of the gospel away from the effects of the Fall.***

In his excellent book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, Dr. William Webb discusses redemptive movement in Scripture. He explains that Christ is moving his people from the ravages of the Fall to life in his Kingdom. This process is progressive. Webb uses three great social issues as case studies for serious Bible students who want to discern how to apply Scripture to modern problems. He explains the X- Y - Z principle:

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 1:26-27

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 3:16

<sup>31</sup> Genesis 3:15

<sup>32</sup> I Corinthians 11:11-12

<sup>33</sup> I Corinthians 12:4-11

<sup>34</sup> I Corinthians 12: 25

<sup>35</sup> I Corinthians 12:26

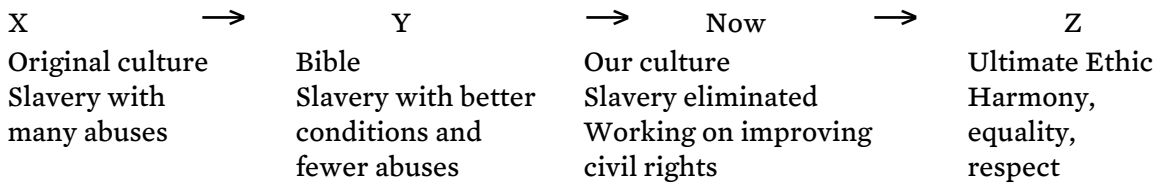
**X** = the original cultural context — at the time a section of the Bible was written  
**Y** = the words in the Bible  
**Our culture**—where we are now  
**Z** = The ultimate ethic— where we are heading

It is helpful to think of a line passing from X to Z, from left to right. Like this.

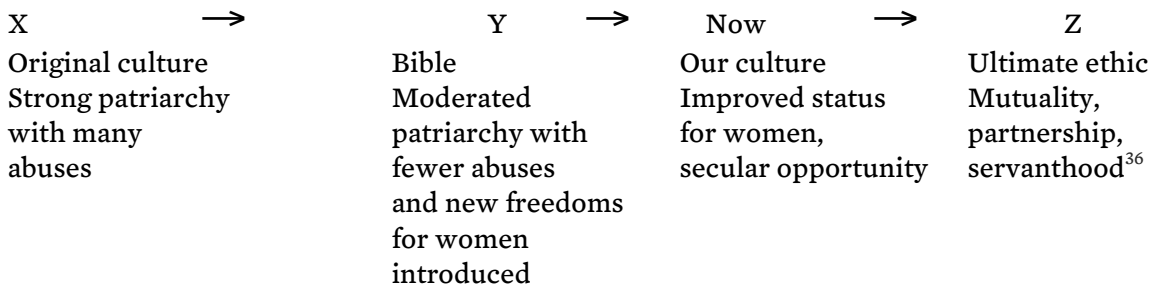


In the cases of slavery and women, Webb shows that, through the chronological history of the Scriptures, the redemptive movement is from restriction to freedom (an arc moving upwards, signifying increased freedom, from left to right). As far as homosexuality is concerned, however, the Scripture consistently, from the first page to the last, presents homosexual activity as sinful and outside God’s will (a straight line moving from left to right).

Webb’s argument is that we are to be used by God to keep redemptive movement of Scripture (Y) moving toward the ultimate ethic (Z). Whereas homosexuality will always be considered a sinful activity, slaves and women experience a transformed reality. Using slavery as an example:



William Wilberforce did not allow the passages in Scripture concerning the appropriate way to treat slaves to convince him that slavery was God’s desire. He saw God’s ultimate kingdom value of equality and was used by God to keep the redemptive movement advancing toward expression of the ultimate ethic. In the same way, the upward arc concerning views of women in Scripture from the days after the Fall through the glories of the New Covenant are profound.



As we read the Bible, we see redemptive *movement* away from the relational manifestations of that original sin. We see *movement* away from repeated sacrifice to the single, overcoming atonement of Jesus’s death. We see *movement* toward freedom for slaves. We see *movement* from beginning to end toward liberty, love, and care for women.

<sup>36</sup> *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*, William J. Webb, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2001, p. 37–38

We believe God is calling Bent Tree to sharpen, refine, and further implement that movement. We believe God is calling us to embrace the fullness and beauty of the grace seen in the reality of the New Covenant, as we move onward toward mutuality, partnership, and servanthood.

### **3. God champions the fruitful leadership of women in the New Covenant community in conjunction with their male counterparts.**

As the church started to grow, women were quickly introduced to leadership roles in a radical departure from the cultural expectations of the day. There is credible biblical evidence that women served in a variety of leadership roles.

#### *Apostle*

In Romans 16:7, Junia appears in scripture as a female **apostle**:

*Greet Andronicus and Junias, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.*<sup>37</sup>

Andronicus and Junias are called “outstanding among the apostles.” The word “apostle” here is not being used to designate one of the original twelve, but someone commissioned on behalf of someone else. The name “Junias” could be male or female. Interestingly, there is no record of the name Junias having appeared in any text of Romans until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to that (as in the KJV), it is “Junia.” It is now widely recognized among theologians that Junia is more accurate, and that Junia is feminine. The likelihood is that Paul was sending greetings to a man and a woman, both apostles, probably a husband and wife like Priscilla and Aquila, whom he had just mentioned in the same chapter.

Kenneth Bailey writes,

*The title of apostle (as applied to Junia) cannot be seen as a casual reference to an insignificant early Christian witness. With Chrysostom, the Early Fathers, Arabic and Syriac Christianity, and the Authorized Version translators, we can affirm with full confidence that Junia (feminine) was an apostle.*<sup>38</sup>

#### *Prophet*

Ephesians 2:20 affirms that the household of God is built on “the apostles and prophets.” Whoever they were, these early Christian prophets occupied an important place in the New Testament church. Some of these prophets were women. In Luke 2:36, Anna speaks as a prophet.<sup>39</sup> In Acts, Paul stays in Caesarea with Philip the evangelist, whose daughters prophesied.<sup>40</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, Paul offers advice to men and women prophets on

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<sup>37</sup> Romans 16:7, NIV

<sup>38</sup> “Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View,” *Anvil*, v. 11, n. 1, 1994, pp.

<sup>39</sup> See also Acts 2:17-18; Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5

<sup>40</sup> Acts 21:9

head-covering *while prophesying*. However we interpret this text, it is clear that both men and women were praying and prophesying. Praying could refer to private devotions. Prophesying, however, is necessarily an act of public proclamation. And of course, Peter's impassioned speech on the church's birthday centered on this Holy Spirit activity emanating from both men and women.<sup>41</sup>

### *Deacon*

Women also held the office of deacon. Two texts are relevant here: In Romans 16:1-2, Paul writes, "*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.*"<sup>42</sup> Phoebe is called a servant, which is an interesting translation of the word elsewhere translated "deacon" (*diakonos*) **not** a deaconess. Most likely this masculine ending is used because Phoebe was fulfilling the clearly defined ministry of deacon that was equal to the male deacons. Interestingly, in 1 Timothy 4:6 *diakonos* is applied to Timothy himself in a context where it is usually translated "minister." Paul refers to himself and to Apollos as *diakono*i in 1 Corinthians 3:5. A first century deacon therefore could also have been a "minister of the gospel."

In 1 Timothy 3:8-11 qualifications, first for "deacons" and second for "the women," appear. The two lists exhibit striking parallels:

*Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. **Women** must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*<sup>43</sup>

The Greek word for "**women**" is sometimes translated "**their wives**" but the natural translation is preserved in the New American Standard Bible. It's likely meaning in context is "**the women deacons.**" These women should be seen as engaged in activities directly related to the church in the same way as the men. Incidentally, deacons who are appointed in Acts 6 appear in Acts 7 and 8 as *preachers* of the word (cf. Stephen and Philip) and we have early church evidence that women existed in the role of deacon in the church at least up until the third century.

### *Teacher*

Women were also found teaching, and even instructing men in the New Covenant community. Acts 18:24-28 describes "Priscilla and Aquila" as taking Apollos aside in Ephesus and "they explained to him the way of God more adequately." It uses the plural "they," showing that Priscilla is as involved as Aquila in the exercise of teaching. The fact that Priscilla's name appears before her husband's leads many to believe that she was the more prominent teacher, as men's names almost always preceded their wives' names in ancient Roman culture. This bears witness to the fact that in the early church, a woman (Priscilla) teaches a man (Apollos).

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<sup>41</sup> Acts 2

<sup>42</sup> Romans 16:1

<sup>43</sup> 1 Timothy 3:8-11, NASB

### *Church planter*

Although church planter is not an official leadership position in the early church, it is one that carries enormous responsibility. When Paul was in Philippi his first convert was a business woman named Lydia. After she responded to the gospel, she led her entire household to be baptized. She must have had quite a large home, because later in the story Paul visits the fledgling church at Lydia's house.<sup>44</sup>

### *Elder*

But you might be asking, "Is there any reason to think that women held the role of elder in the early church?" Although the culture would have frowned upon women holding leadership roles, the possibility of women elders is seen in 1 Timothy 5:1-2:

*Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.*<sup>45</sup>

This text is open to two interpretations:

The first is the interpretation that comes from the translations which say an 'older man' and 'older women' (e.g. NASB, NIV). The idea from that interpretation is that these are instructions given generally to all older men and older women in the church. This translation, however, is built on the assumption that chapter 5 opens a new subject and is unconnected to chapter 4.

The second interpretation is to recognize that at the end of chapter 4, there is specific reference to the 'body of elders' who laid hands on Timothy.<sup>46</sup> This body of elders was composed of the *presbuteroi*, (i.e. the elders). In 5:1-2 (remember that chapter divisions were not inserted by Paul), the same word appears twice, first as a masculine singular (*presbutero*) and then as a feminine plural (*presbuteras*). These two words are usually translated as 'older man' and 'older women.' Support for this translation is found in the fact that 'young men' and 'young women' are also mentioned in the text, making it easy to see age references as the primary theme of the verse. But it is also possible to argue that the entire passage from 1 Timothy 4:6 to 5:22 is addressing leadership and ministry in the church. If that is the case, and admittedly this is the minority opinion among scholars, then the familiar translation of 'older women' is actually meaning 'women elders' as 'older men' means 'male elders.'

### *Summary*

Scripture *clearly supports* women in the New Covenant community being teachers, prophets, and deacons. There is also *possibility* of female elders and the *almost certainty* of a female apostle. All of this is in a culture where women were not equal to men in society at large, but certainly not in the Jewish synagogue from which so much of the early church

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<sup>44</sup> Acts 16:40

<sup>45</sup> 1 Timothy 5:1-2, NASB

<sup>46</sup> 1 Timothy 4:14.

took its form. As the fledgling New Covenant community found its way in the world, it is staggering to see the countercultural treatment of women within her ranks. The redemptive movement was in full gear!

#### **4. There is no favoritism in the New Covenant community.**

Peter, Paul, and James teach that, at the cross, we are equal—all ethnicities, every socio-economic status, and both genders.

*For God does not show favoritism.*<sup>47</sup>

*My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.*<sup>48</sup>

*Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism.”*<sup>49</sup>

We cannot simultaneously affirm God’s rejection of favoritism within the New Covenant community and affirm the notion of supra-cultural and preordained gender roles in ministry. To say that God is partial to male elders is to say, “There is no partiality with God, except when there is.” We reject this analysis. We really are equal at the cross, and God’s impartiality so pervades the gospel that we are forced to reject any notion of functional favoritism among the genders.<sup>50</sup>

#### **5. Love is the answer.**

Love is the answer the Holy Spirit provided through Paul to the division wrought over worship service disunity.<sup>51</sup> We believe a tangible way to love all of our brothers and sisters in Christ is to encourage leaders of both genders and all races to allow Jesus to lead through them in any and every respect. Without deep expressions of love for one another as believers, through the laying down of power and the relinquishment of the church’s leadership to both genders, the roles become dissonant and irrelevant. We believe that sharing leadership with our sisters in Christ is an expression of God’s love and grace.

In his foreword to Jackie Roese’s book *Lime Green*, Dr. Scot McKnight wrote,

*Those in power perpetuate themselves. This is the way things have been, the way things are and the way things will be, unless those in power, put down their power to empower those not in power.”*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Romans 2:11, NIV

<sup>48</sup> James 2:1, NIV

<sup>49</sup> Acts 10:34, NIV

<sup>50</sup> Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1; James 2:8-9; 1 Timothy 5: 21; Acts 10:34.

<sup>51</sup> 1 Corinthians 13

<sup>52</sup> *Lime Green: Reshaping Our View of Women in the Church*, Jackie Roese, His Publishing Group, Dallas, Texas, 2015, p. xi

In other words, unless leaders share leadership with those previously considered ineligible, groups suffer and individual potential goes unrealized. This is true on playgrounds, high school theater departments, businesses, Capitol Hill and, unfortunately, the church. We prefer to love our sisters by sharing leadership with them. We are convinced our church will be led more effectively and our daughters will grow up understanding that they are free to exercise their spiritual gifts in the church.

*In essentials, unity*  
*In nonessentials, liberty*  
*In everything, love*

## Appendix: Big Questions

Anticipating some questions you may have...

*It seems that the board is simply going along with the culture. Many churches have functioned without women elders, so why make a change now?*

The Christian church has almost universally placed restrictions on women's roles in the church until relatively recently. This has been based on an understanding of certain passages in the New Testament (particularly 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15), encouraged by the example of Jesus being male and his appointing only males to his apostolic team of twelve.

The question we must ask is whether recent changes in perspective are a result of the church being driven by the prevailing culture to become “inclusive” in disregard of Scripture, or whether there has been a genuine flaw in the common interpretation of Scripture by many Christians on this issue in the past. We don't wish to criticize previous consensus about the meaning of Scripture, but we do need to face the fact that long-standing agreements have previously proved to be fallible in several instances. For example, in the widely accepted justification for slavery by Christians in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and more recently the position on the superiority of one race over another as practiced in the southern United States, Colonial Africa, and elsewhere. Neither of these issues would be acceptable today as legitimate and biblically justifiable, though both issues were fought for by some “Bible-believing Christians” for many years on the basis of their interpretation of certain parts of the Bible. The reason the issues at stake were not challenged is that this was the practice of the culture at large, so it was easy for Christians to avoid questioning them (with notable exceptions). Similarly, women have been denied equality with men as a general practice in most societies until fairly recently, so the church in the United States has never had to face this question as honestly and deeply as it is being forced to today.

*Explain the difference between a supra-cultural directive and a principle.*

*Supra-cultural* means that the directive is to be applied in all places at all times, irrespective of cultural norms or shifts in mores. “Do not commit adultery” would be a great example. A *principle* is an idea that can be applied in a variety of ways depending on cultural realities. A little background on the interpretation of Scripture might be helpful.

We need to read Scripture carefully, with three governing *rules of interpretation*:

1. Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit as the revelation of God's will, and therefore whatever its meaning, it must be submitted to and obeyed.
2. Scripture was given at a particular time in a particular cultural context. The context and culture influenced the assumptions made by the first readers and determined its *initial application*. It is important to distinguish between supra-cultural directives and principles, and for the latter we need to understand the historical context in order to learn the principles being taught.
3. Those principles must then be reapplied in the culture and context of the present reader. This *may well involve practical applications that differ from those in the original setting*.



For example: Jesus said to his disciples, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you must do as I have done for you.”<sup>53</sup> Does this mean foot washing is a necessary exercise for Christians, because it was commanded by Jesus? The face value of the text would suggest so (and some Christians have sought to follow this practice). Alternatively, does the principle here have little to do with washing feet, but that we must serve one another in humility? There was nothing spiritual about foot washing, but something very practical after the dusty journey people made on foot. We don’t walk great distances on dusty roads, so the principle of serving one another remains the valid command of Jesus, but not the specific action of washing one another’s feet!

Similarly, the instructions Paul gave about women wearing a head covering and keeping their hair long were important in a culture where prostitutes were known by their uncovered heads (sometimes shaved). The church was enjoying the freedom of not conforming to the world, leading some to believe that women no longer needed to keep their hair long and their heads covered. Paul told them that to not do this would be misunderstood and bring shame and disgrace to their husbands.<sup>54</sup> Therefore the *actual practice* of a woman wearing a head covering does not apply in our culture, though the *principle* of not causing our freedom to be a stumbling block to the world does.

This is an important discussion, because part of the decision-making process around women elders required us to determine whether the passages that restrict women are supra-cultural directives that still apply directly to us, or if we are to find instead a principle to apply in a culturally appropriate way.

*But doesn’t the Bible teach that men are the head of the church?*

No, actually it does not. Ephesians 5:23 tells us in no uncertain terms that *Christ is the head of the church*. We must be careful to define ministry in the church, not in terms of hierarchy and status but of service and submission.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, the whole church functions under the authority of Jesus Christ. He is its head<sup>56</sup> and our service is to be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus”<sup>57</sup> (which means, *under his authority, on his initiative, and by his power*). To discuss roles within the church, whether male or female, therefore is to discuss *servanthood not hierarchy, submission not authority*.<sup>58</sup> Christ is the authority to which we all submit, whether male or female.

*But two passages in the New Testament that expressly forbid women from being leaders or teachers in the church, don't they? What do you do with 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2?*

As part of our process, the Board of Elders believed it was essential that we avoid confirmation bias—that is, that we not reach a conclusion about what we believe and then tailor our study of Scripture to that conclusion. Instead, we avoided reaching conclusions

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<sup>53</sup> John 13:14–15, NIV

<sup>54</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:12

<sup>55</sup> Matthew 23:8–12 and Mark 10:42–43

<sup>56</sup> Ephesians 1:22

<sup>57</sup> Colossians 4:12

<sup>58</sup> See Mark 10:41–45

until we conducted our study of Scripture. Faced with texts that in some cases free women, but in other cases restrict them four alternative responses are possible:

1. We take the texts that approve women's ministry and ignore the others.
2. We focus on the apparent restrictive statements of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 and overlook the implications of there being in the New Testament women teachers, deacons, prophets, (possibly elders), and an apostle.
3. We conclude that the New Testament is ambiguous enough to leave us free to choose whatever position seems most relevant to our time, culture, comfort, and preference.
4. We examine the historical settings of the restrictive texts to see if there is a more consistent outlook with the positive statements.

We followed **option 4**. We accept without questioning that God's intent was not to divide the church over divinely inspired passages written by Paul on the subject of women in the church. They must be harmonized, not ignored or glossed over. The two most challenging passages are featured here below:

- 1 Corinthians 14:33–35 says a woman must “*be silent*” in church.
- 1 Timothy 2:11–15 says a woman “*must not teach*” or “*have authority*” over men.

### **1 Corinthians 14:33-35**

*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people. Women should **remain silent** in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.<sup>59</sup>*

A text must always be interpreted in its context. 1 Corinthians 14 does not stand alone, but is part of a single section that runs from chapter 11 through 14. Disorder in worship and the discussions regarding women in the church open and close this four-chapter unit.

In 11:4–5 the *men and the women* are prophesying. Thus the reader knows that the prophets who interrupt one another in chapter 14 are comprised of *both men and women*. So when the women in 14:34–35 are told to be silent and listen to the prophets, it is clear that *some of those prophets are women*.

It is important to see that in 14:26–36 three groups of people are addressed who are disturbing the flow of public worship, and are all told to stop talking!

1. In 14:27–28, the *speakers in tongues* are told: If there is no interpreter, **stay silent in the church**.
2. In 14:29–30, the *prophets* are told not to all speak at once, and if a revelation comes to one and someone else is speaking, then the first speaker should sit down and **be silent in the church**.
3. In 14:33, *married women* with husbands who also attend are told: Don't ask questions during the worship. Ask your husbands at home and **be silent in the church**.

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<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33–35, NIV

The unifying theme is about things being done decently and in order, and these three groups should at various times **learn to be silent** when they might otherwise disturb the flow of public worship. Paul is obviously not commanding the prophets to be permanently silent, but to refrain from prophesying that is out of place. Nor is he telling the speakers in tongues to be permanently silent, but for “two or three” only to speak and the rest to remain silent. There are times when gifted people are silent because of other circumstances in play that make it advisable. This is helpful to remember when attempting to understand and apply the texts that restrict women in the church.

It is in the same way that the women are asked to be silent, if their talk is disrupting the flow of public worship. Paul is saying: *Don't interrupt in church. If you can't understand what is being said, ask your husbands at home.* It is evident that men had more education than women and would be in a better position to explain things to their wives. It is therefore not a permanent prohibition on women speaking (for he has spoken of women prophets already in 11:5), but a prohibition on their disrupting the service by asking questions in the service. And this principle is to be enacted “in all the congregations of the saints.”<sup>60</sup> It is never appropriate to disrupt a worship service.

The elders of Bent Tree determined that this text is not a timeless supra-cultural directive, requiring married women to not talk while at church. Instead, it is a *principle* reminding us to maintain order in worship, and if anyone is disrupting it to instruct them to be quiet. Thus, we believe there is nothing in this text to prevent a woman from being an elder at Bent Tree.

### **1 Timothy 2:11–15**

*A woman should **learn in quietness** and full submission. **I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man**; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*<sup>61</sup>

Let's break the text into its various parts:

#### **A woman should learn in quietness and full submission**

The cultural context of this passage is crucial. Paul wrote two letters to Timothy after sending him to serve and lead the church in Ephesus. There were evidently some significant problems with women in the church in Ephesus as the following verses indicate: 1 Timothy 5:15, Paul mentions women who “have in fact already turned away to follow Satan”; 2 Timothy 3:6-7, Paul mentions “gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>62</sup>

There may have been reasons for this. Ephesus was home to the temple of the goddess Diana (one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world). There are certain things we know about the temple of Diana. A group of female virgins exercised power over the temple along with some eunuchs (castrated men). Under the control of these women were

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<sup>60</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33

<sup>61</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11–15, NIV

<sup>62</sup> Both quoted from NIV

thousands of female priestesses. In this atmosphere, male religious leadership was almost non-existent, and where it did exist, it lacked a sense of dignity and self-respect. No church is ever totally isolated from the sins of its culture. The group of women Paul refers to (above) may have asserted enough power to gain followers of questionable (maybe even heretical) views. Timothy was young, frequently sick, possibly depressed, and male.

In this context, Paul writes to Timothy: *“Let a woman learn in quietness with all submissiveness.”* He is obviously referring to women who need instruction. Some translations say: *“Let a woman learn in silence.”* The Greek can also be translated, *“Let a woman learn in quietness.”* The religious culture of Ephesus had been matriarchal, but now many have been converted to Christ (this is a first generation church) they need to be in a mutually submissive relationship with Christian men, without the attitude of “take over and tell men what to do.” This is to include *“with full submission,”* but submission to what? He doesn’t specify, but in the context of talking about *“sound doctrine”* with which the letter opens, the simple reading is that he intends them to submit to the apostolic teaching of the church.

### **I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.**

We believe that Paul uses these words to signify a context-specific instruction. If we isolate that verse and take it at face value as a prohibition on women teaching men, it excludes Priscilla teaching Apollos, the women prophets of Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:5), and Philip’s daughters in Caesarea (Acts 21:9). The text actually goes farther than prohibiting women teaching men, it reads, *“to teach I do not permit a woman, nor have authority over a man.”* Teaching is in the emphatic position at the beginning of the verse and separated from the prohibition of having authority over men.

If this is a supra-cultural directive, women would be forever forbidden from teaching children, youth, or adults in the church. However, if we put it into the historical context of prevailing events in Ephesus, and the rest of Paul’s letters to Timothy it would be possible to understand Paul as saying: *I permit none of these doctrinally ignorant women (in Ephesus) to teach, because they have brought their wrong beliefs into the church, and they need to know that women are not in any way superior to men as the temple of Diana has taught them, and now that they are Christian they need to learn in quietness and submission to right doctrine.* If they really are bringing heretical thoughts into the Body, we certainly wouldn’t want them teaching our kids, right?

All the women in the church in Ephesus were obviously not heretics or guilty of this, but in the light of the dangers Paul has written about with the *“gullible women”* and those women who had *“already turned away to follow Satan,”* he may be saying *“I permit no woman to teach”* because all of them are asked to first study quietly the apostolic faith! This may have been an appropriate ruling, given the tensions and circumstances in Ephesus, but we do not believe it is a universal command to the church prohibiting women teaching or having authority over men.

Paul affirms in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ *“there is neither male and female.”* Progress towards that goal of equality of the sexes cannot be made if either gender is asserting power over the other. In Galatians, Paul is very harsh with male heretics, but here he deals with female destroyers of the faith.

There are places today where radical feminists are sufficiently anti-male that men find themselves intimidated, with leadership opportunities denied them because they are

male. Neither gender is completely innocent of mistreating the other and if Paul's vision in Scripture is followed, neither gender has the right to absolute control over the other.

**For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.**

This is a difficult text for it appears to be in conflict with Romans 5, where Paul says, "*sin entered the world through one man,*"<sup>63</sup> and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 where he says that "*by a man came death.*"<sup>64</sup> But now in 1 Timothy, Eve is held responsible for sin! Reference to events in Ephesus again may help us understand what was intended for the first readers. The cult of Diana may have left the idea (even among the new Christians in Ephesus) that men had polluted the earth with their sin. Paul may be responding to these anti-male sentiments by saying, "Eve was a transgressor!" meaning, she also is to be blamed, not only Adam.

Are women more easily deceived than men? Is Paul making a statement of fact concerning a female's ability to discern as a reason for restricting her from leadership? Hardly! Eve was deceived because she was new to the scene. Adam was created first and had time to name all the animals and enjoy fellowship with God before Eve showed up. *She was more vulnerable because she was less experienced.* The women in Ephesus were the same, so Paul sensibly instructed them to learn before assuming any leadership in the church.

**But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.**

The verb "to save" at the heart of this text, is used in the same chapter to say that "God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."<sup>65</sup> Paul explains this is through "one mediator . . . the man Christ Jesus."<sup>67</sup> Having said that salvation is through Christ, are we then to understand him, ten verses later, to say, "Well, actually, for women there is a second way to be saved—have a baby!"? This cannot be the meaning Paul intended.

The verb "to save" (Greek, *sozo*) can refer to salvation, but it can also mean "good health" and occasionally has a more general sense of "to prosper." Apparently, someone in the church in Ephesus was teaching the women that they should not get married, and thus naturally, not have children. Paul counters with: *Childbearing is not an evil act! A woman can prosper through childbearing; if they (the husband and the wife) continue in faith and love and holiness with good judgment.* Notice how the text shifts from a singular "*she*" to a plural "*they*." This plural is best understood to refer to the husband and wife and not to women in general. Children can be a blessing to the family. But if faith, love, holiness, and good judgment are missing, the family will not necessarily prosper by having children.

As a side note: This text reminds us that there are some things that only women can do, like delivering babies. But our differences go beyond the biological, don't they? The elders of Bent Tree celebrate the distinctive traits of the two genders and deeply value feminine insight and perspective. We believe the synthesis of both male and female insight, true shared leadership, will enable the team of elders to lead more effectively.

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<sup>63</sup> Romans 5:12, NIV

<sup>64</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:21, NASB

<sup>66</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4-5

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

The elders came to consensus that this text is not a timeless, supra-cultural directive forbidding women from leadership and teaching in the church. Instead there is a *principle* to apply: Don't place vulnerable, unlearned believers into positions of leadership or teaching, they are easily deceived and will lead the Body astray. Instead encourage them to learn and submit themselves to clear biblical doctrine first. Or in other words, "Don't teach until you've been taught, and don't lead until you've learned."

When the historical circumstances are regarded as significant ingredients in the understanding of the first readers, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 may be understood as telling women to be silent when they disrupt public worship and 1 Timothy 2:11–15 tells the new converts from a culture dominated by the cult of Diana that they do not have authority over men anymore, but rather to recognize equal status in the church of Jesus Christ. These admonitions are understood, therefore, as being in harmony with the clear affirmations of the presence of women as teachers, prophets, deacons, possibly elders, and as an apostle. All of this can be seen as supportive of the unity of the church expressed by Paul in Galatians 3:28 where in Christ "*there is neither male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*"

*But when Paul gave the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3, he said that elders need to be "the husband of one wife," which means only men can be elders. Right?*

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul is discussing overseers. An overseer was a person charged with leading any initiative or group in the church. This is a text we use at Bent Tree when vetting Life Group leaders, youth group leaders, captains in the kid's ministry, worship team participants, and so on, not simply elders. The text begins this way:

*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach . . .*<sup>68</sup>

Paul explains the character traits of a spiritual leader. One of these traits is that the overseer be "husband of one wife." Is that clause a timeless *supra-cultural directive*, or a *principle*? If one takes it as a directive it eliminates, from elder service, single men, divorced men, widowed men, current elders whose wives die, men with more than one wife, and, of course, women. It would also preclude Jesus and Paul, neither of whom had a wife. Elsewhere, Paul argues that being single is an advantage in ministry because you have so much more capacity.<sup>69</sup> Polygamy was frowned upon in Jewish and Roman circles as well, although Jews did tolerate the polygamous practices of rulers like Herod the Great. But Paul was clear in 1 Cor. 7:2 that the Christian norm was monogamy. So, Paul could be addressing polygamy in this clause, but it is more likely that he is referring to the heart of the leader, and whether he or she is thoroughly committed to his or her spouse. Paul may very well have been saying, "If there is a guy who you are thinking of making an overseer and he has two or more wives from before he was a Christian, pass on that guy."

If that was his message, it would be a timeless directive, because polygamy is sinful in all times and places. Since polygamy is not a problem we have, how might this text apply to us? The *principle* would be that purity matters in our leaders and if one can manage his

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<sup>68</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1–2, NIV

<sup>69</sup> 1 Corinthians 7

or her home faithfully, they they are eligible to help manage the church. Is the leader faithful to their spouse if married, or walking in purity if not? This text could easily apply to a female elder candidate, as the expectation would be for her to be thoroughly committed to her husband.

*Don't our bylaws require that elders be men?*

No, there is no gender distinction or language of any kind in our bylaws concerning the qualifications for elder. Restricting the elder board to men is an “unwritten rule” that we are changing, thus no official or legal changes are necessary.

*If I disagree, do I need to leave the church?*

Pete Briscoe wanted to answer this one personally: “No, absolutely not! When I came to Bent Tree to candidate, I shared with the elders that I believed women should be free to exercise their gifts fully in the church. They admitted they had not heard this perspective before but were willing to discuss it with me. My position has not changed in the time I have been here. For the last 24 years, I have submitted to the consensus of various elder boards who felt we should forbid women from elder leadership with hardly any conversation around the topic. I have chosen to *agree to disagree agreeably* and have thrown myself into my service here. If there are those who disagree with the present decision, I will ask them to do the same. This is not a decision to break fellowship over. We are one in Christ, his Spirit unites us, we share the essentials of the faith, even if we disagree on secondary issues. Please, agree to disagree and jump back into serving. There are lost people all around us who need to be touched by God’s grace!”

*How can I learn more?*

We encourage you to be open to the leading and teaching of the Holy Spirit in your life for learning and growth. Do what the elders did and submit to a process of exploring God’s heart in this matter, which will take time, study, and prayer. Start by reading carefully through this paper and look up all the Bible passages. Read the surrounding context and ask the Spirit to guide your discovery. If you are still hungry for more, the following books will help you understand the elder’s position more clearly, although not all the elders would agree with everything written therein. They are listed in order from the easiest to read to the most technical.

### **Lime Green**

By Jackie Roesse. This is a moving story of one woman’s journey.

### **Beyond Sex Roles**

By Gilbert Bilezikian. Dr. Bilezikian was instrumental in the birth of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Since it’s inception Willow Creek has had women elders and Dr. B’s perspective was a guiding light in their leadership decision.

### **Recovering Biblical Ministry by Women**

By George and Dora Winston. George studied at Wheaton College and got his Th.M. from Dallas Seminary before embarking on a teaching and church planting ministry in Belgium.

Whereas the Winstons hold a complementarian view of marriage, they provide in depth refutation of objections and restrictions to ministry by women in the church.

### **Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood**

John Piper and Wayne Grudem, editors. This is a thoughtful anthology of over 20 authors and is the most extensive treatment of complementarian perspectives in the last 20 years.

### **Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy**

Rebecca Groothuis, Ronald Pierce, and Gordon Fee, editors. The editors asked 26 evangelical scholars, firmly committed to the authority of Scripture to explore historical, biblical, theological, hermeneutical, and practical issues surrounding women in ministry. It is a long book (500 pages), but the contributors are solid and their contributions are fair and thoughtful.

### **Men and Women in the Church**

By Sarah Sumner. Dr. Sumner is the Chair of the Department of Ministry at the Haggard School of Theology. Her perspective is enlightening as a woman leader in the church and a scholar as well. Dallas Willard said of this book, “This is a deep and important book with a significance far beyond what the title alone would suggest. . . I strongly encourage anyone who is concerned about the conduct of the visible church life to study this book carefully.”

### **Women in the Church’s Ministry**

By R.T. France. France uses the issue of women in the church to discuss biblical interpretation. Along the way you will learn much about this issue.

### **Slaves, Women and Homosexuals**

By William Webb. This book is a challenging read. Webb demonstrates the difference between the biblical treatment of woman and homosexuals. Dr. Darrell Bock, in his foreword to the book said, “If . . . you want simply to have your views confirmed, then do not read this book. . . . This is serious fare for those willing to examine their beliefs, both theological and cultural, in these controversial areas.”