

A Biblical Case for Women Elders/Ministers/Pastors
A Summary Article
v.4 by Mark Maney

(this article is a summary of my longer compiled research document)

Introduction

Let me begin with a story. It was after a church service and I went to talk to a new young couple which was visiting. We got talking, and eventually the question came up, “So what brought you here today?” Immediately, without hesitation, and with some animus in his eyes, the man said, “Our old church just hired a woman pastor.” And that was that. He felt that was all I needed to know to fully understand why they left their church.

The issue of ordaining women as elders and ministers has gained renewed attention within the Presbyterian church, and the global evangelical and protestant church as well. For example, Rick Warren’s old church was recently just kicked out of the Southern Baptist Convention for ordaining a woman pastor. I’ve had many young Christians approach me with their concerns over women eldership. One reason I think this issue has resurged in relevance is likely due to the current cultural moment, where ideas about gender, gender roles, and sex differences have been called into question.

Thus, I felt it was necessary to present a thoughtful, biblically rooted response to clarify the position of why we ordain women as elders and ministers and its merits within the broader Christian and Presbyterian community.

When researching this question, I actually went and looked up why the PCANZ ordained women to begin with. I contacted archives and they sent me the official material the PCANZ put out defending the ordination of women.

As a Christian, I found much of the argumentation rather concerning.

Much of the argumentation could be summed up as, “it’s the <insert current year> Bro, we need to get with the program.”

“Look at all these other churches who are ordaining women,”

“women can do what men can do,”

“is it right to say someone can’t be a minister because of the way they were born?” and,

“St. Paul didn’t write those passages silencing women anyway.”

While the Bible was definitely interacted with, it seemed more of an obstacle to be overcome rather than the source of the answer to the question.

Looking at recent efforts to revise PCANZ teachings on sexuality, I'm struck by the parallels to the PCANZ debates about ordaining women. Once again, biblical reasoning seems secondary or a mere obstacle. The emphasis is on aligning with evolving social values and norms. Arguments highlight ideas like equality, inclusion, and identity. Though the issues differ, in both cases extra-biblical considerations are at the forefront when advocating for doctrinal change, while actual scriptural basis is minimal.

The same pattern emerges across the decades - biblical authority and reasoning takes a back seat to cultural perspectives when pushing the church to shift stances. This pattern of extra-biblical factors taking priority over Scripture itself should concern us deeply as Christians. Though cultural perspectives shift rapidly, God's Word remains fixed and authoritative.

On issues like women's roles, we must be vigilant against smuggling in personal philosophies or catering to societal trends. Many of the women elders I've known perform the role of elder better than many of the male elders I've known. But that is largely irrelevant for the biblical faithful Christian. Scripture alone determines the qualifications for church leadership. We must not permit modern notions of equality and inclusion to manipulate how we read the Bible. Nor can we allow past abuses or injustices to replace a biblical passage's meaning. I understand the desire to make Christianity appealing and progressive. But God calls us to faithfulness, not popularity or political correctness. We must uphold His unchanging truth, not the fluctuating spirit of the age.

This requires humility and courage. When approaching currently charged questions like women elders and ministers, we must pray for grace to exalt biblical reasoning over all else. God's design is always best, regardless of shifting cultural tides. Our task is to discern and obey His wisdom, not society's.

Now, the church absolutely has made mistakes in biblical interpretation throughout history (universally preventing women being elders and ministers I believe is one of them!). As Presbyterians, ongoing reformation and reform is part of our DNA. We must maintain humble, teachable hearts, realizing we do not have perfect knowledge or insight. Our finite minds will never fully grasp the infinite riches of God's Word. There is always room for growth in our scriptural understanding. However, any reforms we make must be firmly rooted in and guided by Scripture itself. We cannot simply bend biblical truths to fit shifting cultural values or norms.

Any push for change must flow from wrestling honestly with the Bible's teachings, not from accommodating modern perspectives. Reform is necessary at times, but it must arise from Scripture re-examined, not from disregarding passages that feel inconvenient. We want to be a church that grows constantly in theological depth and maturity. But the means for that growth is God's Word, not the transient leanings of our age. Scripture is the rock from which we mine deeper understandings of truth through the Spirit's illumination.

With that all said, let's now get into our biblical case for women elders and ministers.

First, a clarification of terms.

Christian *egalitarianism* is the belief that men and women hold equal standing in the eyes of God and can therefore be given equal roles and responsibilities within the church and home. Meanwhile, its counterpart, Christian *complementarianism*, posits that while men and women are equal in their intrinsic worth, they have been assigned distinct, complementary roles in the church and family structure as ordained by God.

I will be arguing for Christian egalitarianism.

Here is a Four Step Argument for Women Elders/Ministers/Pastors

(Argument 1) Scripture does not explicitly prohibit women from church leadership roles such as elders.

(Argument 2) The Genesis creation account does not establish permanent male authority, instead emphasizing companionship, partnership, and equal male/female dominion over creation and the alleviation of the curse's effects should involve promoting gender equality, including female eldership.

(Argument 3) Considering the presence of women as teachers, prophets, apostles, and deacons in the early church, it is logical to support female eldership. Distinguishing "eldership" or "pastoral roles" from these other functions in a manner that excludes one gender from them ignores the inherent gender equality present in Christian ministry and the adaptive nature of church roles and offices.

(Conclusion) Therefore, the credibility of the above arguments make the endorsement of female elders/pastors consistent biblically and theologically.

Let's look at argument one.

Scripture Does Not Explicitly Prohibit Women from Church Leadership Roles Such as Elders

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

There are two biblical texts which are primarily pointed to as teaching that women cannot be elders, 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-12.

A key approach to understanding these two primary prohibition texts is to notice the similarities between them. Although it is not claimed that both texts address identical situations, their similarities are considerable and noteworthy.

Interpreting one text without the other would be unwise. When one compares the flow of each argument and their vocabulary, a number of similar features emerge.

In the verses prior to each prohibition, Paul addresses the proper manner and behaviour of Christian believers in their particular cultural and church situations. Scholars may not know exactly what the situation was in each church. But it seems clear from the immediate context that Paul's focus is on how to do certain church-related activities—the right manner of doing things as Christians.

For the church at Corinth, the question is “how do we prophesy?” Paul's answer is in verse 27: it should be by “*two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret.*” And what if there is no one to interpret? The next verse (v. 28) answers: “*the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.*” Verse 29 says, “*Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.*” And verse 30, “*And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.*” Verse 31, again, provides a descriptive detail about the activity of prophesying: “*For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.*” Paul is not addressing the generic question of who should prophesy; he is concerned with how it should be done. This attitude dominates the tone and content of the immediate context.

Similarly, for the hearers of 1 Timothy, the questions are perhaps “who should we pray for?” and “how do we pray?” and “how should we dress?” and eventually, “how should women learn?” The Apostle says prayers should be “made for all people,” which is specifically defined as “*for kings and all those in authority*,” (1 Tim 2:1). But then he gets even more detailed about prayer in verse 8: “*Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.*” How should one pray? With hands lifted up—and with a certain attitude: without anger or disputing. “I also want,” Paul continues in verse 9, “*the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes.*”

Again, right down to the particular style of a person’s hair, Paul specifically targets the manner of Christian behaviour. Paul is not addressing the general enterprise of prayer, as if to determine who should dress and who should pray; he is concerned with how it should be done. This attitude permeates the immediate context—and, indeed, the chapter as a whole.

Therefore, unless there is some clear, major indicator that Paul’s train of thought is interrupted, readers should expect that Paul continues to follow this attitude in both 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. It would be odd to shift gears and stop talking about manner and, for example, begin to make new, broad generalizations and universal claims about generic activities for all churches for all times and for all situations.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

So what is Paul doing in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 then when he says,

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

The prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 should not be read as a universal ban on women speaking in church gatherings.

When understood within the immediate cultural and church context Paul is addressing, it becomes evident he is targeting a specific behavioural issue

involving disruptive conduct. In the preceding context, Paul focuses on addressing the proper manner and behaviour of believers in the Corinthian church setting. His concern is providing guidance on how to appropriately participate in church activities like prophecy. Paul aims to establish guidelines for orderly conduct, not prohibit activities altogether.

Given this contextual focus on correcting behaviour and maintaining order, the prohibition in 14:34-35 likely targets a specific abuse - certain disruptive questioning by wives that should be asked privately of husbands at home (v.35). Paul seeks to stop this disruptive questioning to promote orderly learning, not ban women's participation entirely. Further evidence that Paul's focus is proper conduct in a local context is found earlier in chapter 11, where he affirms women praying and prophesying in the assembly. He could not categorically silence women here without contradiction with chapter 11.

In summary, based on the cultural/church context of addressing appropriate behaviour, the theme of orderly participation, Paul's endorsement of women speaking prophetically (ch. 11), and the situational detail in v.35 (ask questions at home), Paul does not universally prohibit all speech by women. He prohibits a specific disruptive behaviour by wives so as to promote orderly worship.

The passage should be understood situationally, as guiding proper conduct in a local context, not doctrinally, as a categorical ban on women speaking in church, and therefore not prohibiting women from church leadership roles such as elders. The only universal take away here is that Christians should be respectful in and not disrupt, church services.

1 Timothy 2:11-12

So what's happening in 1 Timothy 2:11-12,

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

The first thing to note in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is that the only imperative in this passage is "a woman should learn." While v.12 contains prohibitions using infinitives (in the Greek), it has no additional imperative commands beyond "let a woman learn." The syntax of v.12 prohibits certain actions but does not itself contain imperative verbal forms.

Let me try explaining the difference in simpler terms:

In verse 11, "a woman should learn" uses a Greek word that gives a direct order or command. It tells someone to do something.

But in verse 12, "I do not permit" is structured differently. It does not use a Greek command word. It is a statement about what Paul does not allow.

It's like the difference between:

"*Eat your food*" - This is telling you to do something, like a command.

"*I do not allow hitting*" - This states what I do not permit, but it is not a direct command.

So in verse 11, Paul gives a command by saying "a woman should learn." But in verse 12, he makes a statement about what he does not permit or allow. He is not commanding women to do or not do those things. The words "do not permit" state Paul's rule, but they do not give a direct order like the earlier command "let women learn." This is important, because it tells us that Paul is maintaining focus on the context of women learning established in v.11. In verse 12 he is giving additional behavioural guidelines in regard to the context of women learning, not blanket leadership prohibitions.

This is further made clear in the Greek text where there is a conjunction, the Greek word 'de', which connects 1 Tim 2:11 and 2:12, translated as "but" or "and" in some English versions. This conjunction shows that verse 12 continues the train of thought from verse 11. Paul does not abruptly shift topics between verses 11 and 12. Many common English translations do not translate this conjunction into English. So in those versions, the connection between verses 11 and 12 is not as clear to English readers.

The connection between verses 11 and 12 is further strengthened by Paul's use of the Greek word for "quiet," *hēsuchia*, in verse 11 specifically in reference to the manner in which women should learn - that is, quietly and submissively. This gives the word a particular nuance shaped by the context - it refers to the quietness or silence expected for appropriate learning behaviour.

The word *hēsuchia* only occurs one other time in the entire Pauline corpus (2 Thess 3:12), so Paul's use of it again so soon after v11 in v12 is notable.

Verse 12 then has Paul prohibit women from teaching or assuming authority over a man.

He concludes this prohibition with the phrase "remain quiet," derived from the same Greek word from v.11, *hēsuchia*. This contrast catches attention. If Paul simply wanted to make a categorical prohibition, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man" he could have just stopped after stating it. But instead he makes the rhetorical choice to end by contrasting it with *hēsuchia*, "she must be quiet." This suggests Paul is intentionally connecting back to his previous discussion of learning, by repeating this rare word that now carries a nuance referring to proper learning behaviour.

In summary, beyond just repeating a vocabulary word, Paul's specific contextual use of *hēsuchia* in verse 11, the rarity of the term, and his rhetorical choice to contrast his prohibition with it in verse 12 together suggest meaningful textual linkage with verse 11. By ending verse 12 with a reference to "quietness," Paul is linking the prohibition on teaching and authority to the learning context he just addressed, along with connecting the ideas with the conjunction 'de', and only issuing one imperative in this clause, "let women learn". This suggests Paul's focus is on correcting disruptive behaviour in that specific context, women learning, rather than making new universal categorical prohibitions.

Paul's general point seems clear enough: it is hard to learn if you're the one doing all the talking. The women were failing to learn quietly and submissively as they should. Instead, they were teaching and assuming authority in a disruptive, inappropriate manner as learners. So Paul is prohibiting them teaching and assuming authority specifically when it's being done in a disruptive, domineering way by those who should be quiet learners. He is not making a generalized universal claim about women having teaching authority or being elders.

Authority, Usurp Authority, and *Authentein*

Let's talk a little bit about the word authority in this passage, as there is some controversy about it.

The Greek word translated as "authority" in 1 Timothy 2:12 is *authentein*. There has been significant scholarly debate regarding the precise meaning of this rare word. Some argue it has a neutral or positive sense of authority, claiming it simply refers generically to the exercise of authority without negative connotations.

However, many claim that in the context of 1 Timothy 2, *authentēin* carries a more negative nuance of domineering or assuming authority. This fits with Paul's tone of correcting wrong behaviour rather than prohibiting a genuinely positive exercise of authority (like preaching the Gospel authoritatively in your own church).

The exact translation and implications of this controversial term impact how the passage is interpreted. Having said this, I think the rare Greek word *authentēin* in v.12 does carry a negative tone of dominate or assume authority, fitting Paul's corrective context.

Some reasons for this are the fact that Paul uses the word *authentēin* at all. If Paul were talking about who should exercise authority in the church, why didn't he use one of the regular Greek words for authority or leadership, like he does *everywhere else* that he mentions authority or leadership? The Louw-Nida *Greek-English Lexicon for the New Testament* identifies 13 words in the semantic domain “exercise authority” and 48 words in the semantic domain “rule, govern”, but *authentēō* is not among them.¹

The fact that Paul instead chose the extremely rare *authentēin* strongly implies he is addressing a particular situation requiring specific nuance. When a writer selects peculiar, uncommon vocabulary when common synonyms exist, it often signals a distinct contextual meaning rather than a broad, general statement. As an example, Paul could have used the more common word *exousia*. Paul had the common Greek word *exousia* readily available to refer generically to authority. *Exousia* was used extensively in ancient Greek for authority, power, or right. Jesus possesses and exercises *exousia* (Mt 7:29, 9:6). Secular rulers have *exousia* (Lk 20:20). Church leaders have *exousia* over congregations (2 Cor 10:8). Believers can have spiritual *exousia* from God (Lk 9:1). Paul could have easily used *exousia* in 1 Tim 2:12 if he meant a generic exercise of authority.

Further, if Paul is referring in v12 to “church leadership, in particular, eldership functions”, then why does Paul not employ one of his own words for an elder's function which he uses later in the same letter (*proistēmi* = “to preside, lead” in 5:17; or *epimeleomai* = “to care for” in 3:5), or the word for the elders’

¹ <https://terranwilliams.com/a-first-response-to-mike-wingers-11%c2%bd-hrs-video-on-1-timothy-2/>

Cited 10 January 2024. This does not mean that Louw-Nida is better than other lexicons; the purpose is to illustrate the oddity of using *authentēō*.

responsibility to “shepherd” a church (*poimainō*), which we find in his speech to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28; see also John 21:16; 1 Peter 5:2), or even the word which the writer of Hebrews uses for the function of church leadership (*hēgeomai*) (Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24; see also Acts 15:22)?²

But instead, Paul chose the extremely rare *authentēin*, used only once in the NT. This strange word choice fits addressing a particular situation, not making a universal prohibition. *Authentēin* often had a negative tone of dominated or self-asserted authority in ancient uses in this time period.

Translations like the NIV ("assume authority") and KJV ("usurp authority") capture this nuance. This kind of meaning is supported by the Latin Vulgate translation which reads *dominari* (from which we get the English word "dominate"). In fact, that has been a more historical approach to the meaning of this verb until the late twentieth century. For example, Linda Belleville has traced a unified reading of this verb through the centuries:

Erasmus (1519): “usurp authority”
 Geneva (1560): “Usurpe authority”
 Webster (1833): “usurp authority”
 Fenton (1917): “dominate”
 Goodspeed (1923): “domineer”
 Williams (1937): “domineering”
 Spanish UBS (1966): *dominar*³

Further, the context of using *authentēin* in this passage is of correcting wrong behaviour, suiting a negatively nuanced word. Contrasting *authentēin* with "quietly" also suggests a meaning like "dominate" or "assume authority."

In this context, it is unlikely Paul would prohibitively correct an activity that is genuinely positive.

Paul is addressing a specific problem behaviour here, not banning something inherently good (like preaching the Gospel authoritatively, for example). Therefore, both Paul's word choice and the context suggest a specific, negative situation, not a universal prohibition.

² <https://terranwilliams.com/a-first-response-to-mike-wingers-11%c2%bd-hrs-video-on-1-timothy-2/>
 Cited 10 January 2024.

³ See Linda Belleville, “Lexical Fallacies in Rendering *authentēin* in 1 Timothy 2:12: BDAG in Light of Greek Literary and Non-Literary Usage,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 29, no. 3 (2019): 317-41, 318.

In Summary and the Gender Inclusiveness of Moral Commands

In summary then it's important to see that yes, Paul is teaching that a woman can't usurp the authority of a man or teach a man. That's 100% exactly what 1 Timothy 2:12 is saying. But it's saying that in the context of "when women learn". It's not some new separate command that Paul is just pulling out of nowhere. He's not saying, "women learn. Oh, and remember you can't ever teach a man the Gospel authoritatively in a church setting". He's saying, "women learn, and it's hard to learn when you are doing all the talking, so sit down, be quiet, and listen to the men who have the authority to teach you."

And this principle applies to men as well. If men are being taught by women, and those men try to usurp the authority of the woman teaching them, well, men need to heed Paul's words, and be quiet and listen.

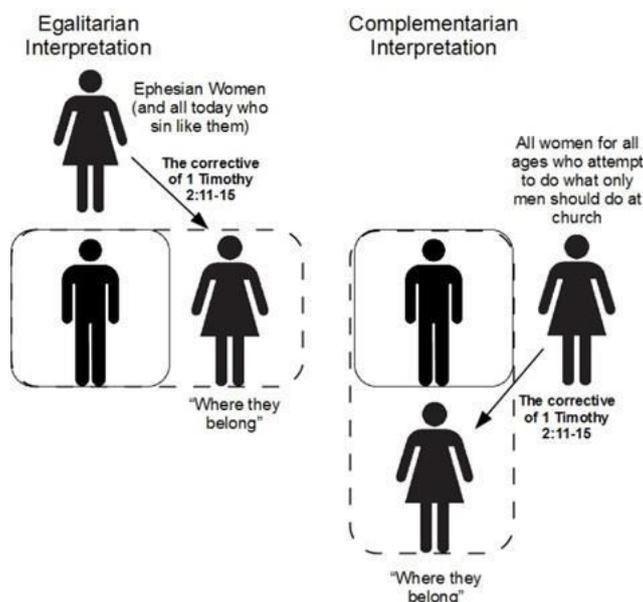
Some complementarians might object and say that the command is given only to women, and thus cannot apply to men. There seems to be this idea that if the Bible gives a command to one gender and not another, it's safe to assume that the command cannot be applied to the opposite gender. But this is not the case at all. Consider the Ten Commandments, where only husbands are forbidden to covet their neighbour's "wife" (Ex 20:17). It is doubtful that Moses allowed wives to covet their neighbour's husbands. In the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-12, male deacons must not be "addicted to much wine," "not greedy for dishonest gain," and "managing their children and household well." But the "women" in 3:11 (probably women deacons, though they could be deacons' wives) lack these specific qualifications. Are we really to believe that Paul allowed women deacons (or wives of deacons) to be addicted to wine, greedy for dishonest gain, and managing their children and household poorly? Of course not. In 1 Peter 3:3 and 1 Timothy 2:9-10, the authors tell women that their adorning should not be external. There is no parallel command for men. Does this mean that it is acceptable for men to go overboard with their external adornments? Of course not. In Ephesians 5:33 and 1 Peter 3:2 the authors tell wives to respect their husbands. There is no parallel command given for husbands. Does this mean it is acceptable for husbands not to respect their wives? Of course not. Several times Paul tells fathers not to "provoke their children" (Eph 6:2; Col 3:21), but he issues no such parallel command for mothers. Does this mean it is acceptable for mothers to provoke their children? Again, not at all.

1 Timothy 2:13-14

What, then, of the next two verses in 1 Timothy 2?

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:13-14)

Paul is referencing the Genesis account to address the situation in Ephesus. The women were acting pridefully by challenging their male teachers. Paul is pointing out the irony - men were created first, yet these women were putting themselves ahead. Eve was the one deceived, yet these women were correcting the teachers as if they knew better. Paul, in his own way, is referencing Genesis to persuade the women to settle down, be still, and listen submissively. In effect, Paul is saying, “you should learn quietly and respect your male teachers while in church (otherwise you’re not going to learn anything); you’re not any smarter than them (have you noticed the history of deception?) nor fundamentally better than them (have you forgotten where you originally came from?). So settle down and be humbled.”



Thus, the problem in both passages (1 Cor 14/1 Tim 2) is disruptive questioning, disruptive pride, and lack of submission by women, not the legitimacy of women in ministry roles like elder. These passages do not address church offices like eldership, nor forbid authoritative Gospel teaching in church by women, or universally prohibit women from having authority over men.

Given all this, it appears these texts do not prohibit women elders.

What does 1 Timothy 2:15 mean then?

But that leads to what is probably one of the most confusing verses in the whole Bible.

¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2:15)

1 Timothy 2:15 is often grouped together with verses 13-14 by complementarians. They interpret verses 13-14 as Paul grounding his instructions in verses 11-12 in the creation order - specifically, God's intent for men and women based on how he created them. The ability of women to bear children seems to fit with this context about God's creative purpose.

However, as discussed above, verses 13-14 are not actually an example of Paul appealing to the creation order to support his instructions in verses 11-12. Rather, in verses 13-14, to support his instructions in verses 11-12, Paul is underscoring the need for humility among the Ephesian women he was addressing.

Further, reading the text in the seemingly straightforward way that many complementarians do creates a significant theological problem. Christians do not believe that women's souls are saved by motherhood. Moreover, it is counter to the gospel to insinuate that childless women are going to hell because they are childless. Therefore, theologically, this verse cannot mean what many complementarians appear to want it to mean. And yet, the passage is clearly saying, "*But women will be saved through childbearing*". So what's going on here? This is where knowing the fuller context of 1 Timothy, and the context of what we have been discussing becomes helpful.

So what is Paul teaching in 1 Timothy 2:15?

I believe the key to understanding 1 Timothy 2:15 comes from later in the letter, first, in 1 Timothy 4:3 and then 1 Timothy 5:11-15 (we will get to 1 Timothy 5:11-15 in a bit). We know that some people in the Ephesus church were forbidding marriage. They were probably teaching that celibacy was a moral, and even a necessary, virtue. Paul considered these ideas to be doctrines of demons!

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.” 1 Timothy 4:1–3

Despite Paul's disapproval, celibacy remained a prominent issue in the early church. Early Christian writings reveal that abstaining from marriage, sexual relations, and childbearing was often viewed favourably, linking sexual abstinence with salvation and resurrection.

Paul is cautioning the women of Ephesus against excessively interpreting holiness as completely abstaining from sexual relations and childbearing with their husbands. Paul wants the Ephesian women to know that having sex and having children would not jeopardise their salvation: *women **WILL** be saved*. I believe Paul is using the word “saved” in 1 Timothy 2:15 with the same basic meaning as he did earlier in the same chapter when he wrote that God “wants all people to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4 cf. 1 Timothy 1:15; 4:16). So yes, Paul is talking about salvation here. But in what sense? Another key in understanding this verse is the word “through”.

Somewhat similar language for “saved through” is used in 1 Peter 3:20 and in 1 Corinthians 3:15.

For example, Paul's message is similar to the analogy in 1 Peter 3:20–21 where Noah and his family were “saved *through (dia)* the water” (symbolizing baptism and salvation), in that the Ephesian women will be saved *through (dia)* the experience of childbirth. Paul is assuring the Ephesian women that having children will not lead to their damnation.

In 1 Corinthians 3:15 and 1 Timothy 2:15, Paul uses the same verb, *sōthēsetai*, meaning “s/he will be saved.” In Corinthians, he speaks of those who will be saved despite suffering loss “as *through (dia)* the fire.” In these passages, going “through water,” “through fire,” or “through ‘having children’” suggest that these experiences, despite their challenges or dangers, do not endanger salvation. This aligns with the broader New Testament message, as in Acts 2:21, which states, “Whoever calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved (*sōthēsetai*).” This verse, among many others, indicates that salvation is ultimately about depending on Jesus.

The second key passage in 1 Timothy to help understand what Paul is getting at in 1 Timothy 2:15 is 1 Timothy 5:11–15.

In 1 Timothy 2:15 Paul uses the word *teknognias* which means “childbearing” and also carries the nuance of pregnancy, delivery, and raising a child. Why is this important? Later in 1 Timothy, Paul uses a cognate of *teknogonia* (1 Timothy 5:14). Again, Paul’s concern is celibacy. He instructs Timothy not to enrol young widows as official widows as this would entail a pledge of celibacy which could be difficult to sustain (1 Timothy 5:11–15).

“¹¹ As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. ¹² Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. ¹³ Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. ¹⁴ So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. ¹⁵ Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.”

Paul wanted the young widows to get married and to have children (*teknogonein*) and engage in the usual activities of respectable women which they couldn’t do if they held to flawed ideas of celibacy and procreation (1 Tim. 5:14 cf. 1 Tim. 4:3).

Remember, 1 Timothy was composed in response to "other" teachings (1 Timothy 1:3-4). 1 Timothy 2:15 appears to counter a peculiar teaching in Ephesus, where people were excessively embracing concepts of holiness by avoiding sexual relations and not having children with their partners. This trend wasn't rare in the early church and early signs of this behaviour are also evident in 1 Corinthians 7. It is true that Paul preferred celibacy for himself, but he did not strongly recommend it. Rather, for example, in 1 Corinthians 7, he cautioned the Corinthians about being too hasty to choose celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:2, 7, 8-9, 28).

So why is Paul addressing this issue here, verse 15, at the end of his rebuking of women who were usurping their teachers? A good case can be made that it was because this teaching (flawed ideas of celibacy and procreation) was the main issue that the women of Ephesus were usurping their teachers’ authority with.

So, to sum up, what is 1 Timothy 2:15 trying to say? Whether a person has a child, or not, has no effect on whether they will be saved; a faithful follower of Jesus will be saved either way. So stop trying to promote otherwise! The verse has nothing to do with gender roles, or grounding in the creation order that women cannot teach the Gospel authoritatively to men.

Does 1 Timothy 3 Assume Male Elders Only?

The qualifications for elders laid out in 1 Timothy 3 do not present any definitive prohibition against women serving as elders. In fact, several features of the passage point to an intentional openness to women elders.

First, Paul introduces the qualifications with the gender-neutral term "tis" (anyone), rather than a masculine term. This signals that the qualifications apply equally to men and women.

Second, the phrase "one-woman man" was a Greek idiom referring to sexual purity, not a requirement of maleness. That Paul is using this phrase in its idiomatic way is evidenced by verse 12, where Paul uses the same phrase in reference to deacons, after making clear in verse 11 he is speaking of both men and women deacons. Since the phrase in verse 12 explicitly includes women, Paul is clearly using the expression in its idiomatic gender-inclusive way. This strongly suggests the same phrase applied to elders in verse 2 carries an equally gender-inclusive meaning.

In addition, Paul avoids using any male pronouns or possessives in the Greek, even though some English translations add them. This suggests Paul purposefully wrote in a gender-inclusive manner.

The qualifications are also indicative, not absolute definitive/legislative requirements, describing suitability rather than rigid prerequisites. For example, this list would prohibit Jesus and Paul from qualifying as elders, if read definitively, given that they did not have households to manage, children, nor were married. Throughout church history, church groupings, irrespective of whether they permit or restrict women's leadership, have always read these qualifications as indicative, not as definitive/legislative requirements.

Even prominent complementarian scholars, like Douglas Moo, admit this passage does not exclude women elders. And when addressing who can be pastors and elders, leading complementarians John Piper and Wayne Grudem do

not cite 1 Timothy 3 in their massive tome *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, likely because it does not support restrictions on women.

This is a serious weakness for those advocating male-only eldership, since such a fundamental rule would be expected to be stated clearly. Yet it is notably absent from the most relevant passages on qualifications. There is no definitive biblical statement restricting eldership to men. Those claiming women cannot serve as elders must rely on controversial interpretations of other passages not directly addressing the issue.

The Objection from Qualifications for Women Deacons

Some argue that since Paul specifically refers to qualifications for women deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11, he must be intending to restrict eldership only to men because he does not mention women elders like he mentions women deacons. However, the mention of women deacons does not definitively prove elders must be male. Paul may be addressing a specific issue related to women deacons in Ephesus that did not apply to women in the role of elder. Or, perhaps there were not any women elders in Ephesus at that particular time, so Paul did not need to address any issues with women elders. His use of the gender-neutral "tis" to introduce elder qualifications, along with other evidence of gender inclusiveness, suggests Paul did not intend to forbid women from serving as elders. The women deacons reference does not override the larger context of openness to both genders in church leadership roles.

Taken as a whole, 1 Timothy 3 and the parallel passage in Titus 1 which shares the same features as 1 Timothy 3, present a picture of openness to both men and women serving as elders, providing they meet the qualities of character and spiritual maturity that benefit church leadership.

The Genesis Creation Account and Gender Equality

Now let's look at argument 2: The Genesis creation account does not establish permanent male authority, instead emphasizing companionship, partnership, and equal male/female dominion over creation and the alleviation of the curse's effects should involve promoting gender equality, including female eldership.

Is patriarchy (the one-way-only rule of men over women) part of God's original good design or a consequence of human sin? Complementarians assert the Old Testament reveals a divine inclination towards a godly patriarchy, with distinct divinely ordained roles for men and women.

It's true the overall tone of the Old Testament covenant community was male control. So it's no surprise complementarians find evidence to support their views. However, a closer examination reveals that the Old Testament also contains an implicit critique of the patriarchal attitudes that were present within the covenant community.

The Genesis creation account establishes an ideal of mutuality and partnership between man and woman without hierarchy.

Genesis 1 emphasizes that God created male and female together in his image, and jointly commissioned them to rule over creation as co-regents. This defines the ideal as companionship and shared authority, not male dominance. Genesis 2 reinforces this ideal. Eve is created as Adam's ally and helper to alleviate his loneliness. But the Hebrew term for "helper" does not imply subordination. God is described as Israel's helper, yet has authority. The text does not state male authority over woman. Rather, Genesis 2:24 explains that man and woman "become one flesh" in marriage. This implies equality, as Paul confirms when saying husband and wife have authority over each other's bodies (1 Cor 7:4).

Sometimes complementarians read male dominance into Genesis 2. They argue man's priority in creation and naming woman imply authority. But by the same logic, one could argue woman is superior since she comes from man, not dirt; is made last in an order progressing from inferior to superior; and that man has to leave *his family* for her.

In reality, the teaching of Genesis is that the creation ideal is co-regency of men and women over creation and not gender hierarchy discrimination of any sort. Male rule enters as a distortion in Genesis 3:16, not as God's ideal design. This critiques patriarchy.

It should be noted that the idea that male rule/patriarchy was a result of the Fall was a common view in the Early Church. As an example, John Chrysostom, who became archbishop of Constantinople around the end of the fourth century AD articulates the egalitarian view on this question.

Chrysostom's position is significant because even though he was a complementarian and supported male authority over females in a fallen world, he taught that it was *not God's original design*. According to Chrysostom, male rule only came about as a consequence of human disobedience, not something instituted at creation.

In his homilies on 1 Corinthians, he says this:

“Wherefore, you see, she was not subjected as soon as she was made; nor, when He brought her to the man, did either she hear any such thing from God, nor did the man say any such word to her: he said indeed that she was ‘bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh’ (Gen. ii. 23): but of rule or subjection he no where made mention unto her.” (Chrysostom, *1 Corinthians*, Homily 26)

Chrysostom makes the same point in his homilies on *Genesis* (Homily 14, Homily 16 and Homily 17) where he repeatedly teaches the Woman’s original equality with the Man, including in ‘status’, ‘esteem’, and ‘preeminent authority’.

In contrast to later complementarian views popular today, Chrysostom understands Adam and Eve, ‘Man’ and ‘Woman’, in Genesis 2 as being created with equal ‘preeminent authority’. Woman was not subordinate to Man’s authority until after human sin entered the world.

Other Old Testament Critiques of Patriarchy

The Old Testament then contains more critiques, like authoritative women leading men - Miriam, Deborah, Huldah as examples. Miriam was a prophetess and leader for Israel, sent by God alongside Moses and Aaron (Micah 6:4). As a prophet, she proclaimed God's word to both men and women, as seen when she led the Israelites in song after the Exodus (Exodus 15:20-21).

Deborah was the highest leader of Israel during her judgeship. She prophetically discerned God's will, decided disputes for the nation, and oversaw the military commander Barak, demonstrating leadership over both men and women. (Judges 4-5)

The priest Hilkiah and other men went to the prophetess Huldah to hear the word of the Lord through her. They then brought her prophecy back to King Josiah. (2 Kings 22:14–18; 2 Chron 34:22–28)

These examples demonstrate that women in the Old Testament could authoritatively lead men, proclaim God's word to them, and direct them spiritually. While complementarians may argue these examples were exceptional, the text gives no indication that God or Israel had reservations about the exercise of spiritual authority by Miriam, Deborah, or Huldah over

men. Their leadership contradicts notions that women inherently cannot lead or teach men.

When understood in the context of Genesis 1-3 establishing male-female mutuality, these women indicate that God gifts leadership and teaching authority to men and women alike by his Spirit, according to his sovereign purposes. Their authoritative ministries point ahead to the outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh, including daughters, envisioned by Joel and fulfilled at Pentecost (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18). These Spirit-empowered women undermine gender hierarchies that restrict women from church leadership roles like elder.

The egalitarian trajectory that begins in Genesis reaches fulfillment in the New Testament.

There is a notable move from circumcision to baptism as the covenant signs. Circumcision was given only to male Israelites, reflecting the patriarchy of the Old Covenant. By contrast, baptism is for all believers, male and female, reflecting the mutuality and equality of the New Covenant. Similarly, the Old Testament priesthood was restricted to men. But the New Testament teaches that all believers, not just male church leaders, are priests with direct access to God. The transition from exclusively male covenant signs and priests to the inclusion of women points to the beginning of the reversal of the negative effects of the Fall, including the distortion of male rule over women first introduced in Genesis 3:16. Female elders makes perfect sense given this trajectory.

Considering Women in Leadership Roles in the Early Church

Let's now look at the third argument: Considering the presence of women as teachers, prophets, apostles, and deacons in the early church, it is logical to support female eldership. Distinguishing "eldership" or "pastoral roles" from these other functions in a manner that excludes one gender from them ignores the inherent gender equality present in Christian ministry and the adaptive nature of church roles and offices.

Junia was a Woman Apostle (Rom 16:7)

Who Was Junia?

The name Junia was common for women in ancient Rome, while the supposed masculine form Junias is unattested. This is important because some complementarians have argued Paul was referring to a man named Junias to

avoid acknowledging a female apostle. Further, the church father Origen and other patristic writers refer to Junia as a woman. Modern scholars overwhelmingly agree she was female, including complementarians like Douglas Moo.

Was Junia an Apostle?

In Romans 16:7, Paul calls Andronicus and Junia "outstanding among the apostles." Three views exist:

1. They were well known to the apostles. (this is called the exclusive view as it excludes them as apostles)
2. They were apostles themselves. (the inclusive view)
3. They were lesser messengers called apostles.

The inclusive view (2) has been the dominant understanding throughout church history.

For example, it was held by Church Fathers in the early centuries after Paul and by Reformation scholars such as John Calvin in the sixteenth century. Further, Eastern Orthodoxy, which is complementarian, honours Junia as a female apostle and missionary martyr.

The famous Church Father John Chrysostom, born a native Greek speaker, said in his Homilies, on Romans, Homily 31, that they were apostles due to their works and achievements. He likely had access to information about them we lack today. As apostles with great works and achievements, Andronicus and Junia could have exercised authority in activities like evangelism, miracles, appointing elders, and planting churches. They were imprisoned for their faith like Paul, which fits apostolic ministry.

The exclusive view (1) lacks substantiation. It wrongly disregards context, the views of native Greek speakers like Chrysostom, and the unlikelihood early commentators misunderstood Paul's meaning. The courier view (3) is unlikely since couriers lacked scope for being "outstanding" and were not imprisoned for their faith.

Junia's apostleship shows women could hold authoritative roles

Though Jesus' Twelve Apostles were all male, his choice fulfilled symbolic purposes and does not prohibit women from serving as apostles later. Junia's identity as a woman apostle suggests some women held authoritative leadership roles in the early church. Her example contradicts views restricting leadership only to men.

Priscilla the Fellow Worker

Then there is Priscilla, a woman ministering, leading, and teaching authoritatively.

We see Priscilla and her husband Aquila ministering alongside Paul in Corinth as tentmakers and then traveling with him to Ephesus (Acts 18:1-18). This shows she was considered a close fellow worker with Paul from early on.

It is also significant that in four of the six times Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned together, Priscilla's name comes before her husband's (Acts 18:18, 18:26, Romans 16:3, 2 Timothy 4:19). This was uncommon given typical naming conventions. The two times Aquila's name comes first are when the couple themselves are sending greetings (1 Cor 16:19) and at their first introduction (Acts 18:2). Every other time, when their names are recorded by others, Priscilla comes first. This suggests she was seen as the more prominent leader of the two in the early church.

Most interestingly, Paul explicitly refers to Priscilla and Aquila as his "fellow workers" (Romans 16:3).

This same Greek term, "synergos," is how Paul describes prominent Christian male leaders like Timothy (Romans 16:21), Titus (2 Cor 8:23), Epaphroditus (Php 2:25), and others. In no case does Paul qualify or limit the term when applied to Priscilla, suggesting he saw no difference in Priscilla's authoritative ministry role compared to these men.

In addition, the nature of Priscilla's work demonstrates her authority. Along with instructing the learned Apollos, she and Aquila hosted church bodies that met in their homes (1 Cor 16:19, Rom 16:5). This indicates they held some sort of recognized leadership positions. In Priscilla we see clear textual evidence of a woman ministering, leading, and teaching authoritatively alongside men like Paul and Apollos in the early church. Paul's unqualified description of her as a "fellow worker" suggests he viewed her authority as equal to that of male

leaders. Her story challenges views limiting women's leadership roles in the church.

Phoebe the Deacon and Potential Expositor

Then we have Phoebe who was a deacon and who likely taught the book of Romans (Rom 16:1-2).

Phoebe was a deacon in the early Christian church, as stated by Paul himself in Romans 16:1-2. As the letter carrier for Paul's epistle to the Romans, it is very likely that Phoebe took on the important role of explaining this long and theologically rich letter to the recipients in Rome. Some challenge the idea that letter carriers like Phoebe would have explained the letters they delivered. However, extensive research into ancient letter writing practices provides strong evidence for this being a common practice.

Studies of Greek letters from 200 BC-200 AD by scholar Peter Head conclude that trusted letter carriers often played a crucial role as "personal mediators" of the sender's message. They supplemented the written letter with their own knowledge and served as "the earliest interpreters" of the correspondence. Likewise, in the ancient Jewish context, scholars have found that letter carriers reinforced and facilitated the communication envisioned by the author through oral explanation.

When delivering an exceptionally complex letter like Romans, providing oral teaching and clarification would have been vitally important.

It should also be noted that reading was extremely difficult, especially reading out loud publicly, as there would be no spaces or punctuation in the document and everything written in the same case (as seen below). Having someone familiar with the text and its general meaning would be extremely helpful.

PAULASERVANTOFCHRISTJESUSCALLEDTOBEANAPOSTLESETPARTFORTHE
 GOSPELOFGODWHICHHEPROMISED BEFOREHANDTHROUGH HISPROPHETS
 INTHEHOLYSCRIPTURESCONCERNINGHIS SONWHOWASDESCENDEDFROM
 DAVIDAACCORDINGTOTHEFLESHANDWASDECLAREDTOBETHESONOFGODIN
 POWERACCORDINGTOTHESPIRITOFHOLINESSBYHISRESURRECTIONFROM
 THEDEADJESUSCHRISTOURLORDTHROUGHWHOMWEHAVERECEIVEDGRACE
 ANDAPOSTLESHIP TOBRINGABOUTTHEOBEDIENCEOFFAITHFORTHE SAKEOF
 HISNAMEAMONGALLTHENATIONSINCLUDINGYOUWHOARECALLEDTO
 BELONGTOJESUSCHRISTTOALLTHOSEINROMEWHOARELOVEDBYGODAND
 CALLEDTOBESAINTS GRACETOYOUANDPEACEFROMGODOURFATHERAND
 THELORDJESUSCHRISTTFIRSTTHANKMYGODTHROUGHJESUSCHRISTFOR

Also consider that Romans contains over 7,000 words - far longer than typical letters of that era.

Most people in Rome were functionally illiterate and would rely on the letter being read aloud and explained to understand it fully. Handling Paul's longest and most theological letter would require an authorized teacher able to elucidate its contents.

Phoebe's leadership role as a deacon indicates she held recognized authority and teaching abilities.

As scholar James Dunn notes, for Paul to call her a "deacon" suggests she likely served in this official capacity in the church. Some scholars like C.E.B Cranfield see her as possibly the first example of the formal diaconate office being established.

Furthermore, Paul refers to Phoebe as a "benefactor" (Greek: prostatis) of himself and many others. This term denotes her performing significant ministry and patronage, rather than just generic service. As scholar C. Kruse states, combined with her deacon role, this shows Phoebe exercised "a significant ministry" in the Cenchreae church, her home church.

Given such an authoritative teaching position, her status as a patron of Paul's work, and her task as letter carrier, Phoebe had the knowledge and capabilities required to explain Romans' contents.

Paul's partnership with other women teachers like Priscilla demonstrates his openness to entrusting women with elucidating doctrine.

Therefore, while not stated explicitly, it is very historically plausible that authorized explanation of this essential epistle was part of Phoebe's commission in delivering it to Rome.

Other NT Evidence

And finally, some other evidence quickly from the New Testament that shows women were heavily involved in key teaching and ministry positions in the New Testament church:

First, even Jesus himself inaugurated the practice of commissioning women. After his resurrection, he honoured Mary Magdalene by making her the first witness and sending her to tell the male disciples the good news. This demonstrated Christ's radical posture of authorizing women as partners in gospel ministry.

Across the New Testament, there are no limitations placed on women serving in positions of teaching, leadership, and authority. Lydia seems to have hosted the first church in Philippi. Euodia and Syntyche were likely leaders in the Philippian church, who Paul calls fellow workers, and who possibly held the roles of overseer or deacon in Philippi. Anna, Philip's daughters, and the Corinthian women all exercised prophetic and teaching gifts. Spiritual gifts are never restricted by gender in the New Testament. In the freedom of the gospel, Paul says that in Christ there is no division between male and female (Gal. 3:28).

Finally, the later traditions of church offices and ceremonies cannot be read back into the adaptable, Spirit-led models of leadership evident in the early New Testament Church.

Let us return then to our argument at the beginning (next page):

A Four Step Argument for Women Elders/Pastors

(Argument 1) Scripture does not explicitly prohibit women from church leadership roles such as elders. **Check.**

(Argument 2) The Genesis Creation account does not establish permanent male authority, instead emphasizing companionship, partnership, and equal male/female dominion over creation and the alleviation of the curse's effects should involve promoting gender equality, including female eldership. **Check.**

(Argument 3) Considering the presence of women as teachers, prophets, apostles, and deacons in the early church, it is logical to support female eldership. Distinguishing "eldership" or "pastoral roles" from these other functions in a manner that excludes one gender from them ignores the inherent gender equality present in Christian ministry and the adaptive nature of church roles and offices. **Check.**

(Conclusion) Therefore, the credibility of the above arguments make the endorsement of female elders/pastors consistent biblically and theologically. **Check.**