



# Women of Tapestry

## INTRODUCTION

In discussing the theology of “Women” revealed in scripture, people generally align themselves with one of two camps.

“Egalitarianism” is defined as the doctrine that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities, especially with regard to ministry.

“Complementarianism” is a theological view that men and women have different but complementary roles and responsibilities, especially with regard to ministry.

These views are not fixed points on a continuum of thought, but they represent large categories of belief with some great variances even among people within the same camp. Still, when churches or thought leaders approach this topic, they almost always associate themselves with one of these two belief systems.

The reason you will find sincere, God-loving people in both camps is because the Bible teaches both. Like so many controversial issues, in whatever stream you choose to swim, you can find ample Biblical evidence to defend your position. But God is not divided. Whatever His view, it is unified and without contradiction.

For this reason, Tapestry Church is in both camps. We feel that the convergent verse is *Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Like the egalitarian/complementarian debate, this verse appears to contain contradictions, almost to the point of inscrutability. There is no Jew or Gentile? And yet, there is. There is no slave or free? Paul was writing to slaves and masters – how was this to be interpreted? There is no male or female? That’s obviously not the case. We believe that when you understand this verse, the complementarian/egalitarian debate takes on vivid new clarity.

In parsing this topic, we will look at what the Bible has to say about the role of **Women in Society**, the role of **Women in Ministry**, and the Bible's two most **Difficult Passages** on the topic of women in the church. Finally, we will conclude with **Affirmations and Denials**.

## WOMEN IN SOCIETY

In taking a Biblically comprehensive look at the role of women in society, particularly in the context of home and family, it seems clear that male headship is God's intent. ***In this context, Tapestry is complementarian.***

Perhaps the most compelling argument for us is the Law of First Mention, which is to say, God's original design in Genesis 1 and 2. Adam was created first, then Eve was created as a helpmate for him. Then, because of the fall, this relationship comes with an increased burden for women: ... *your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*

Some will, of course, respond, "But haven't the curses and punishments from Genesis 3 been reversed in Christ," and the answer is yes – in Christ. But not in this world. Men still have to toil, and women would still have pain in childbirth.

For this reason, we are not at all resistant to Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:22-23 *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*

And for the sake of drawing a complete picture of the marriage relationship, we are also not resistant to (i.e., we affirm) the verses that follow commanding the husband to love his wife sacrificially, nourishing and cherishing her. (Too often we see husbands demanding submission from their wives but who at the same time fail to love, cherish, and nourish her).

Nor are we resistant to the multiple other New Testament passages that affirm male headship in the home and family. Male headship in the context of the Christian family is not in any way an indicator of value, intellect, or competency.

We also are non-resistant to the cultural changes that have allowed women to have access to positions of leadership and influence in government, education, and business. These are societal changes that are unaddressed by God's design for home, family, or a Judeo-Christian Theocracy. In no case do we support a view of women that is diminished in value, ability, or dignity. Male headship is the plan of God for home, family, and – up until the time of Christ – for Tabernacle/Temple worship.

## **WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

When Christ died, He *"redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole,'" (Galatians 3:13 NIV)*. So, the punishments from Genesis 3 have been reversed, clearing the way for those of us who trust Jesus to enter the Eden-esque intimacy with God once again in Heaven – eventually. In the meantime, we are caught in-between – with one foot in eternity and one foot in this world.

II Corinthians 5:17 says *"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. All the old has passed away and behold, all things have become new."* And yet, when we get saved, we don't cease to struggle. And apparently, Paul struggled as well, according to Romans 8. What happened was that we were reborn spiritually, but we are still living in a fallen world. We are in the world, but not of this world.

In the world, I struggle. In Christ – I'm a new creation.

In the world, I am rejected. In Christ, I am accepted.

In the world, I am devalued. In Christ, I am highly favored.

In the world, wives submit to their husbands. In Christ, there is no male or female.

***For this reason, in terms of Women in Ministry, Tapestry Church is Egalitarian.***

We offer the following four reasons to support our stance.

Our basis in this begins with the explicitly expressed plan of God articulated in Joel 2:28-32

*“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and **daughters** will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.<sup>29</sup> Even on my servants, **both men and women**, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. <sup>30</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. <sup>32</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.[a]*

In a contemporary context, it is difficult to really comprehend the impact of a verse like this. In the day this was written, a Prophet was as influential and powerful as a king. For Joel to speak of a day when women would prophesy simply couldn't have been more counterculture. And then he re-emphasizes the point: God - who has favored male prophets and priests (complementarian) will one day pour out His spirit on all flesh – men **and** women (egalitarian). And to make sure there was no confusion about this shift, Luke tells us that the day of Pentecost was, in fact, that day (Acts 2).

Secondly, we are greatly impacted by Christ's view of women. In the time of Christ, women were not permitted to be disciples. Indeed, they were not even supposed to be educated. Rabbis would choose from among the Jewish boys those who had distinguished themselves to be disciples, and those young men would sit silently at the feet of the rabbi for instruction. And yet, in Luke 10 when Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha, instead of tending to the guests and housework, Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus. This is not simply a young lady admiring the Master. She was seated at his feet - with the disciples. Again, this is difficult for us to appreciate, but this should have been a scandal. And Jesus, rather than rebuking her, tells Martha that Mary, “has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10: 42) This is a bombshell moment in the New Testament. If Jesus wanted to set the record straight for women, this would have been the opportune time. Instead, he praised Mary.

Thirdly, is the resurrection of Jesus. In ancient Judea, women were so devalued that they weren't even allowed to testify in court. Their testimony was unreliable because they were considered emotional and flighty. It is no

accident that when Jesus appears from the dead, he entrusts this news to Mary Magdalene and instructs her to tell the other disciples. (This act strongly supports the authenticity of the resurrection. If one were intent on fabricating the resurrection, one would have a man make the discovery to bolster credibility.) In fact, when Paul retells the story of the resurrection in the first part of I Corinthians 15, he leaves the women out! (Presumably to preserve credibility). It's not until the Gospels are written decades later that we learn this very important detail.

Fourthly are the many references to women being engaged in ministry in the New Testament church.

In Roman 16 we are told that Phoebe is a Deacon of the church in Cenchrae, as well as being the courier of Paul's letter. As the courier, she would have been the first to read it and, perhaps, teach it to the Romans. We are also told that Junias (a female) is "outstanding among the apostles." While some people debate the exact meaning of that phrase, there are some who believe Junias was, in fact, an apostle. In any case, it is utterly clear that she was a woman who was greatly respected and valued. He mentions Aquilla and Priscilla who, in Acts 18, are credited as being the teachers of Apollos. He also mentions Mary who "worked very hard," Tryphena and Tryphosa "who worked very hard in the Lord," and Persis, the mother of Rufus whom Paul said was a mother to him as well.

That the New Testament provides plenty of examples of women operating in their gifts and callings within the church is beyond question. And up to this point, they have done so without any language to distinguish them from their male counterparts. Were it not for the two troubling passages that we are getting ready to address, an in-depth study of the New Testament would leave little room for doubt about the importance of a woman's role in the church.

So, then, about those two passages...

### **DIFFICULT PASSAGES**

*<sup>34</sup> Women<sup>[1]</sup> should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. <sup>35</sup> 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>[9]</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34-35(NIV)

As we stated in our Methodology paper, it is critical that we do not approach a passage like this saying, "We know what we believe, now how do we make this passage fit?" Instead, we must ask, "What is this passage trying to say," and even more importantly, "what is this passage teaching us about what God values and what He wants for us."

For those who choose a straightforward, literal interpretation of this passage, it simply means that women are not allowed to speak in church. We reject this interpretation on the grounds that it is inconsistent with the rest of the passage. Chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians is Paul's attempt to bring order to what had apparently become a chaotic worship environment. To that end, he gives instructions for orderly worship. In verse 5, he says that wants everyone to speak in tongues, but he would prefer that everyone prophecy. Well, both gifts in this context are for public use – literally in the context of a church service, and he says that he would like them all to move in these public gifts. To underscore that he is talking to everyone, three times (in verses 6, 20, and 26) he says, "brothers **and sisters**." This is especially pronounced in verse 26 when Paul says,

*"What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. "*

So clearly Paul assumes here that each of them – the brothers and the sisters – will come with a variety of public gifts: a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or in interpretation. And it bears noting, that he does not reserve a word of instruction or a revelation to just the men.

He goes on to say *"For you can **all** prophesy in church so that everyone may instructed and encouraged..."*

So again, it seems clear that Paul's expectation was that women would be full participants in this service, with no distinction from the men.

There is an interesting and similarly puzzling passage in 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul gives women instructions about their hair. In verse 5 he says,

*“But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved.”* Clearly, the point of this instruction is something with a cultural context and most people today assume that because very few churches require their women to have their heads covered in a worship service. But notice that even in this passage, Paul is assuming that women will be full participants in the service, including public prayer and prophecy.

Even if one is to take 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 literally, he must admit that it’s not so much a bar to speaking as it is a commentary on how women are to learn. Verse 35 (If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church) seems to qualify verse 34 (The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says). Therefore, one might easily infer this passage restricts women (who were, as previously noted, largely uneducated) from asking questions during the service. This kind of disruption would be out of order...the kind of order Paul is intent on restoring in this chapter.

In summary, because Paul both encourages and expects women to be involved in the church service, and because this passage seems to address how/when (presumably uneducated) women are to learn, we reject the ideas that this passage intends to impose a speech and ministry restriction on women.

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*<sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. <sup>9</sup> I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

*<sup>11</sup> A woman<sup>[a]</sup> should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;<sup>[b]</sup> she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup> But women<sup>[c]</sup> will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

*1 Timothy 2:8-14*



This passage in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy is considered by scholars the world over to be one of the most complex and difficult of the entire Bible. This is due to the use of three Greek words that are extremely rare, two of which are used only once in scripture and almost nowhere else in Greek literature. This makes their use here extremely contextual and difficult to state with certainty.

That said, most complementarians choose to take this passage at face value. They believe this passage is a bar to any woman teaching or holding any position in church where she would have authority over any man. However, as with I Corinthians 14, we must employ a consistent interpretive methodology across the entire passage. If we consistently apply to verses 9 and 10 the same literalistic methodology used by complementarians to interpret verse 12, we would be forced to (as stated earlier) bar women from teaching in any capacity and from having any position of authority over any man. However, we would also have to implement a dress code that for all time restricts women from styling their hair "elaborately" and from wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes. And finally, we have to come to a definitive conclusion as to what relationship childbirth and salvation have and hold strictly to that as well. Is a childless woman ineligible for salvation? That seems unlikely.

What is more likely is that Paul was speaking to the women of his time in a specific church/city/location who has a particular cultural background. What the literalistic interpretation fails to consider, we now will - important cultural aspects of ancient Ephesus.

Ephesus during Paul's life was known worldwide for the Artemisium. This temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (Roman Goddess Diana) was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Artemisium made Ephesus the center of the ancient world for the cult of Artemis, the daughter of Zeus, the twin sister of Apollo, and the goddess of hunting and childbirth. The cult has been shrouded in mystery, but some fresh insights have been provided through an ancient novel called "Ephesiaca" by Xenophon of Ephesus. This novel was first discovered in the 1700s and was dated around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. For that reason, it has been overlooked in Biblical scholarship because it postdates Paul and the early church. But in the last 25 years, this series of small books' origin has been relocated to

around 50 AD, which means that the author has set his story in the exact time and location of Paul's letter to Timothy in Ephesus.

The cult of Artemis taught that she was the mother of all life and that serving her and pleasing her would make you reproductively fruitful. Hers was a woman-led religion and women would worship there daily using incantations and prayers. Their belief was that since Artemis was born before her twin brother, Apollo, women were pre-imminent in creation. They further taught that men were responsible for the downfall of humanity and that redemption rested on the shoulders of women, who were required to worship with elaborated platted hair, coifed with gold and pearls. Indeed, people would make the pilgrimage from all over the ancient world to pay tribute to the goddess of hunting (wealth) and childbirth (life) and seek her favor. Failure to please her would result in poverty and the death of both mother and child in childbirth.

These are the people who responded to the gospel in Ephesus, and this is the faith tradition from which most of them were coming. Now let's re-read I Timothy 2:8-14 in that light.

*<sup>8</sup> Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. <sup>9</sup> I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

*<sup>11</sup> A woman<sup>[a]</sup> should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man;<sup>[b]</sup> she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup> But women<sup>[c]</sup> will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

While we may never know for sure exactly what Paul meant, it seems clear that his words were corrective to this culture. One credible reading of this passage assumes that Paul is setting the theological record straight. Regarding their former religious practice, he says...

1. Men should pray (not just women)
2. Women don't have to adorn their hair with gold and pearls to please God

3. Women don't need to recite prayers or incantations to be received in worship
4. Women are not superior in worship – they should worship in submission, like everyone else
5. Man was formed first, not woman
6. Man was not responsible for the downfall of humanity. It was Eve who was deceived.
7. Women will be saved in childbirth – even though they displease their former goddess

These interpretations are certainly not definitive, but neither is a literal interpretation. We do, however, feel strongly that these passages are exceptional regarding women in ministry. We further feel that to use them as the basis for excluding women from ministry is misguided.

In summary, because this particular passage is so difficult to interpret and understand, because there seems to be credible contemporaneous literature that sheds light on the culture of the day, and because this passage (interpreted literally) seems to stand in contrast to the New Testament's record of female involvement in the church, we reject a literalistic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-14.

Final Note: It is worth considering that without a literal interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-14, the idea of women not teaching or exercising authority over a man would not have crossed the mind of any believer. This passage stands alone as the only (seemingly) explicit bar for women in teaching and leadership roles in the New Testament church. There is not another anywhere in scripture.

## **AFFIRMATIONS AND DENIALS**

(This section is borrowed heavily from Village Church, whose ultimate conclusions we disagree with, but whose format and heart we love.)

**We affirm** that both men and women have been created in the image of God and are entitled to the privileges and held accountable to the responsibilities that come with reflecting our Creator.

**We deny** that either gender has been given or is entitled to greater dignity in society, the home, the church, or the kingdom of God.

**We affirm** that both men and women are necessary for the health and ministry of the church. Godly men and women should be visible partners in the corporate life of the church, deploying their diverse gifts for the good of the body.

**We deny** that the church can flourish without brotherly/sisterly partnership. We deny that a church can exist in which the men flourish, and the women do not, or vice versa.

**We affirm** that the role/function of elder is open to qualified men and women.

**We deny** that all women are subject to the leadership and authority of all men.

**We affirm** that the ministries of the church are open to all men and women who demonstrate godly character, appropriate giftings, and anointing.

**We deny** any theological position that leads to the subjugation, abuse, or neglect of any man or woman. We strongly denounce any distorted view of Scripture that contributes to the belief that biblical manhood or womanhood includes or permits practices such as marginalization, subjugation, intimidation, neglect, or any form of abuse.

**We affirm** that all men and women have been created in the image of God, whether single or married.

**We deny** that single men and women must be married to be meaningful participants in the corporate life of the church. We deny that single men possess any authority over single women. The way that these men love and serve their sisters should not patronize, victimize, or show force, but rather should be the fruit of brotherly love, and vice versa.

In summary, those who lock arms with Tapestry Church should be prepared to see, experience, and support women operating in teaching positions, leadership positions, and any other office/ministry for which one is gifted/

called. Likewise, these women can anticipate being subject to the same encouragement, respect, scrutiny, and correction as their male counterparts.