

# Women in Leadership: How to Decide What the Bible Teaches?

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## The Diversity of Opinion Regarding Women in Ministry

One of the first things that a person discovers in considering the issue of women in ministry is that there is an extraordinary diversity of opinion concerning their appropriate roles and ministries. On the one side, there are those who believe there is a “divine order” in the church and home (as well, perhaps, in all of life), which demands male leadership and female subordination for all times and in all cultures. People who hold to this position sometimes title themselves “complementarians.” There is (as we shall see) a great diversity of opinion, even among complementarians. On the other side of the divide are egalitarians. They believe that roles in the church (and often in marriage) are not determined by gender, but simply by calling and gifting.

Dozens of books have been written on the subject claiming to have the final word. Hundreds of articles, many scholarly and some not so scholarly, claim to have discovered the true meaning of the relevant texts and words within the text such as “head,” “authority,” “silence” and “submission.” What is the average Christian within the Vineyard to do in assessing the blinding array of differing scholarly claims? How can we arrive at even a tentative conclusion regarding who is right and who is wrong?

First of all, we have to frankly acknowledge with all humility that there is no knockout argument or absolute certainty that an honest humble Christian can arrive at concerning this issue. The very existence of such a profound diversity of opinion should caution us about making dogmatic assertions. Honest, thoughtful, intelligent Christians can differ on this issue. There is data in the Bible that does not fit neatly within both of the camps, whether complementarian or egalitarian.

I have undergone a tremendous transformation of my thinking on the issue. When I was a young Christian, I assumed that all roles were open to men and women in the church. I was in InterVarsity, and InterVarsity staff positions, as well as roles on the InterVarsity Exec, were open to anyone regardless of gender.

When Marlene and I moved here to Columbus, the little church that we became a part of came under the influence of an ecumenical movement based in Ann Arbor, Michigan called The Word of God Community. The Word of God Community had a very conservative perspective concerning appropriate roles for men and women. In fact, they went so far as to teach that men should never diaper their babies and should not be present during the birth of their children because this would only lead to gender confusion in the church and in the home.

Most of us didn't go to that extreme, but the Word of God teaching basically formed the early thinking of our church. One of the early books that was highly influential in structuring the debate is a book by a Word of God leader titled *Man and Woman in*

*Christ*, by Stephen Clark. It is an enormous book. It puts gender at the very center of God's plan for the ages, and it overwhelms you with data from the social sciences, geology, primate studies, and biblical studies, in concluding that women were to be always subordinate in marriage and are not designed by God to lead or teach men in the church.

A part of the reason that I adopted the conservative perspective was due to my unfamiliarity with counter arguments by evangelical scholars that I respected. Many of the early biblical feminist arguments either dismissed statements by the apostle Paul by saying things like, "Obviously, Paul was wrong here." or as it turned out in one notorious case, the arguments were made by people who later turned out to be lesbians.

But in the early 1990's I began to rethink our conservative position as a result of several things. First of all, the conservative evangelical position was becoming increasingly incoherent and internally inconsistent for me. Women were permitted in many circles to be missionaries and to lead and teach men overseas, but were not permitted to lead and teach men in America. In some cases women were permitted to teach in a conference setting, but not in church on Sunday. Or they were permitted to teach in church on Sunday, but not allowed to be elders. Or they were permitted to be pastors, but not senior pastors.

It seemed to me that the rules for women's roles were set entirely based on the comfort level of that evangelical church. That comfort level was read back into the Bible by way of eisegesis (reading our opinions into the Bible), rather than exegesis (reading conclusions out of the Bible).

A second major reason that I began to revise my position was that scholars I respected for their work in biblical exposition, such as Don Williams, who has been writing on the subject since the 1970's, Gordon Fee (author of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, *God's Empowering Presence*, and numerous commentaries), and well as Craig Keener (author of numerous commentaries as well as the extremely valuable *Background to the Bible*) began demonstrating in a very convincing fashion (at least for me), that the Bible did not restrict any ministry role in the church only to men.

What I'd like to do, because there is such massive confusion on the subject, is offer you my best and most current thinking on how you and I, as average Christians, can sort through the competing claims made by people we respect such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem (who head up the Counsel for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood) and who take a staunchly conservative position. I want to help you think through how we can decide between folks like Grudem and Piper on the one hand, and Don Williams, William Webb, Gordon Fee, Craig Keener, or Stanley Grenz, who take a decidedly egalitarian perspective, on the other hand. Before examining individual texts, I will offer you seven principles that I employ in interpreting the Bible.

## 7 Principles for Interpreting the Bible

### 1. The Bible should be interpreted according to our stance as empowered evangelicals.

The Vineyard is, by history, choice, and conviction, an empowered evangelical movement. As evangelicals, we can never make an appeal against the scriptures. Anyone who says, "A scripture writer teaches that such and such is true, but I disagree and I urge that Christians believe something contrary to the scripture writer," is departing from our basic evangelical stance.

Thus, when Paul Jewett, a Fuller Seminary professor, says in *Man as Male and Female* that the apostle Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11 assumes a traditional rabbinic understanding of Genesis 2, and that his rabbinic understanding is incorrect, we evangelicals must reject Jewett's reasoning. Scripture is our ultimate authority for our faith and practice. So all of our appeals must be consistent with scripture and may never be against the scriptural witness.

We are *empowered* evangelicals. Our understanding of appropriate rules in the church is based primarily on our conviction that spiritual giftedness determines one's role in the body. Vineyard is primarily a church movement shaped by our experience of the Holy Spirit. Our experience is that the Holy Spirit is non-discriminatory among us. For example, in Acts 2:18 we read, "Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy."

When we study Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts, we see that gifts are not given due to human merit, ethnic origin, social status or gender, but simply as the result of the will of the sovereign Holy Spirit, and also the grace of the risen Christ. There is no text that limits the endowment of leadership or teaching gifts simply to men. We in the Vineyard draw an intimate connection between gifts and ministry.

Thus, as I consider whether a role in the church ought to be open to a person, my first question, as an empowered evangelical is, "Has the Holy Spirit sovereignly given that person gifting for that role?" If I see teaching gifts or leadership gifts in a woman, I find myself in the position of the apostle Peter, who when he was challenged by the Jerusalem church because he had eaten with Gentiles said, "The Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon us at the beginning. So, who was I that I could withstand God?" As an empowered evangelical, I never want to find myself opposing what God is doing in the life of another person. If God is gifting a woman to teach, or to lead, then who am I to stand in God's way?

In saying this, I am following the example of John Wimber, who actually had a conservative, somewhat traditional understanding of the biblical texts. John's understanding of the biblical text was that women were prohibited from being elders. But when John saw that gifts of teaching and what he called "elding" were poured out upon women, he got out of the way of the Holy Spirit. In fact, he blessed Ann Watson to

plant churches. He adopted what, in my mind, was a somewhat inconsistent view. He felt that the Holy Spirit could do whatever he wanted to do, even if it meant going beyond his view of the bounds of scripture. But he endeavored, within his empowered evangelical framework to submit to the Holy Spirit's activity.

Some complementarians set up a sharp distinction between spiritual gifts and ordained offices in the church. They say that women can be equally gifted as men, but there are only certain roles and places that those gifts can be used. In Stanley Grenz's terms, "they must subordinate their view of the church (ecclesiology) under their view of humanity (anthropology)." This is a mistaken hierarchy.

## **2. The Bible should be interpreted in ways consistent with the practice of Christ.**

I have written extensively on this subject in my book, *Who Is My Enemy: Welcoming People the Church Rejects*. It is really important to understand the practice of Christ in light of the culturally accepted view of women in both the Jewish world as well as the Greco-Roman world of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Josephus, who lived a generation after Christ said, "The woman is inferior to the man in every way." Philo, the Jewish scholar from Alexandria, who lived before Christ said, "The attitude of man is informed by reason, that of the woman by sensuality."

The Talmud was explicit in its teaching of women's inferiority. Women were frequently used as examples of undesirable traits in the Talmud (written between the year 200 and 500, but expressing views of much earlier times). The rabbis taught a three-fold daily prayer, still found in some 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish prayer books: "Praise be to God that he has not created me a Gentile! Praise be to God that he has not created me a woman! Praise be to God that he has not created me an ignoramus!" The rabbis said, "Four qualities are ascribed to women: they are gluttonous, eavesdroppers, lazy, and jealous. They are also querulous (whining and complaining) and garrulous." As regards to the last mentioned characteristic of excessive talkativeness, it was unkindly said that "ten measures of speech descended to the world: women took nine and men one."

Whereas the Jewish community put a high priority on education, this priority was for boys alone and did not extend to girls. When it came to teaching the Torah, one teacher declared, "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah it is as though he had taught her obscenity." Indeed, one rabbi went so far as to state, "Let the words of the Torah rather be destroyed by fire than be imparted to a woman."

Jesus revolutionized the perspectives of both the rabbis and the Romans and Greeks before and after the New Testament. Unlike the rabbis who taught that only a man could sue for a divorce, Jesus gave implicit permission for women to dissolve their marriage bonds. To protect women from the rabbinic (Hillelite) school, which permitted men to divorce their wives for such minor infractions as burning their supper, Jesus underlined the permanence of marriage saying, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness and marries another woman commits adultery."

In contrast to rabbinic opinion that women should be barred from learning Torah, we find Jesus teaching Torah to his disciple, Mary, and rebuking Martha, who was fulfilling a culturally accepted role of cooking and cleaning. In contrast to the rabbis, Jesus never made women the butt of his jokes. In contrast to some contemporary Christians, Jesus never portrayed women as more vain, more emotional, or more irrational than men. He never said that women were more prone to theological error. He never suggested that women were less intelligent, or less capable than men.

When you consider the firsts, you see how radical the perspective of Jesus was compared to the culture of his day. The first news of the incarnation went to a woman. The first miracle was performed for a woman. The first Samaritan convert was a woman. The first person clearly told by Jesus that he was Messiah was a woman and a Samaritan woman as well. The first Gentile convert was a woman. The first resurrection teaching was given to a woman. The first to witness the resurrection was a woman. Women were among Jesus' most intimate disciples.

Some people argue that Jesus' choice of twelve men as apostles demonstrates an eternal privileged position for men in the church. I believe Jesus' choice of twelve men was a symbolic act. Jesus was creating a new Israel, the true Israel, centered on his person. He was not demonstrating an eternal principle of male leadership in the church. He was reconstituting Israel by selecting twelve male leaders, which was reminiscent of the original twelve patriarchs.

Remember the twelve apostles were also *Jewish*. Does this mean that Jewish believers should be given a privileged place in the body of Christ over Gentiles when we choose leaders? The apostles were also young, all hailed from Judea and Galilee, and they weren't seminary trained. Why do complementarians focus on their maleness as being a fundamental criterion for selecting leaders, but not on their Jewishness, their youthfulness, or their lack of formal academic training?

I've always loved this statement by Dorothy Sayers, the Christian writer and close friend of CS Lewis, concerning Jesus' attitude toward women:

*Perhaps it was no wonder that women were first at the cradle and last at the cross. They had never known a man like this Man. There never has been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made sick jokes about them...who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously; who never mapped out this sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unself-conscious. There was no act, no sermon, and no parable in the whole gospel that borrows pungency from female perversity. Nobody could possibly guess from the words and deeds of Jesus that there was anything "funny" or inferior about women's nature.*

### **3. The Bible should be interpreted consistent with our view of the eschaton (the end or future for the world and humanity).**

With the coming of Jesus, a new era has dawned – an era that breaks down the barriers formerly dominating human relationships. The biblical writers consistently declared that in Christ the old ways of structuring interpersonal relationships have been superseded. God’s ultimate intention for humanity is stated in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” All the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile and slave and free person as well as male and female have been relativized by the coming of Christ. Does Galatians 3:28 declare a new vision for humanity that ought to have practical functional application in the church, or is it simply a declaration of our equal status in Christ that has no functional application to ministry roles?

Complementarians say that Galatians 3:28 merely states that men and women are equal in the sight of God. But equality “in the sight of God” ought to have social implications in the sight of humanity. We must never divorce our ethics from our theology. The ultimate question when we are forming our ethics is what do you believe the kingdom of God will ultimately be like when it is fully realized? Do you believe that women will be eternally subordinated to men even in the coming age? Complementarians have to believe this because they believe women are subordinate to men by virtue of God’s created order.

But if you believe that the eschaton (the Kingdom of God) will eliminate the subordination of women to men so that we will live without hierarchy as one gender to another, then that should shape our roles now. We pray, “Let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” As kingdom people, our view of the future shapes our view of the present.

### **4. The Bible should be interpreted in ways consistent with the creation accounts of men and women.**

Christian ethics are redemptive, that is, focused on the practice of Christ. They are eschatological, that is, focused on the coming kingdom. They are also rooted in creation. We find in Genesis 1 that men and women are both God’s image bearers. Something of the nature of God is reflected in his image bearing creatures. Since both men and women bear the image of God, they are both assigned the task of ruling the earth, without any reference to differentiation based on sex. Genesis 1 gives no hint of a division of responsibility or a distinction of rank in their administration of the natural realm. They are both equally entitled to act as God’s vice regents for rulership of the earth.

Nowhere is it stated in the creation accounts that man was intended to rule over women within God’s creation design. The fact that no reference is made to authority roles between a man and a woman in a text otherwise permeated with the concept of organization and hierarchy indicates that their relationship was one of mutuality and

equality. What we find in the Genesis account is not manhood as leadership and womanhood as followership. In Genesis 2, we do not find that woman was created to be man's assistant. The word "helper" is used most often of God in the Old Testament. It does not imply an inferior role – women as men's "Gal Friday." Rather, the purpose of woman's creation was to save man from his loneliness. In fact, the image of God is best expressed not by the solitary man, or the solitary woman, but women and men expressing the unity and diversity of the Trinity.

We also find in the creation of men and women not androgyny, which tries to eliminate distinctions between the sexes. Rather, we find men and women as being created differently. Rather than assume that gender difference bars women from leadership, it seems to me that gender difference actually bolsters the case for women and men serving together in every role in the church.

So much of Grudem and Piper's work on male and female biological differences carries with it the assumption that men are created for leadership and women for followership. Thus, they spend much time talking about men being hard-wired to be aggressive. But why is my aggressiveness a more Christian leadership characteristic than my wife's cooperativeness?

For me, gender differences mean that men and women bring different perspectives, different skills, and perhaps different orientations to the task of Christian ministry. But one orientation, set of experiences, or skills is not superior to another. The people of God not only need to hear from a male voice and a male perspective, but also from a female voice and a female perspective. God's people need the wisdom and insight not only of men, but also of women.

Women were created to be partners with men. Thus, they were created from the man's rib, so that they would walk side by side with men through life (in Matthew Henry's quaint saying from the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "If man is the head, she is the crown, a crown to her husband, the crown of the visible creation. The man was dust refined. The woman was dust double-refined, one further removed from the earth. You were not created from his head, so as to rule over him, or from his feet so as to be trampled by him, but from his side to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected, and near to his heart to be loved."). Unfortunately, the purity of walking side by side soon became polluted by sin. In Genesis 3 after Adam and Eve eat of the fruit, God responds to their rebellion by cursing the serpent, cursing the woman, cursing the man, and cursing the ground. The curse given to Eve has been conspicuously neglected by the history of the Church in its zeal to assign blame to her for the sin of humanity. However, it stands unashamedly in the text not as a minor point of exegetical debate, but as a clear marker of the tragic effect of sin. The first curse given to her was that she would have pain in childbirth. The second and no less unfortunate curse is that she would desire her husband and that he would *rule over her*. Here the hierarchical ruling of man over woman is flatly stated to be a product of sin and a part of its punishment. To cling to such a curse is to resist the redemptive work of the restoration of humanity in Christ Jesus, who took our punishment upon himself to set us free to coequally bear his

image as God intended in the first chapter of Genesis: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; *male and female he created them*” (1:27 NRSV, italics mine).

In Galatians, as he is confronting a group of men that insist that circumcision is still a requirement of God, Paul explains the significance of what Christ did for all humanity by his crucifixion: “Christ 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 tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:13-14 NIV). This means that the way into the people of God no longer comes through the law but through Christ and the sign of this inclusion is no longer male only circumcision but through a baptism that is open to both men and women. What was once a distinct privilege available only to men has become a symbol of openness, available for men and women of faith as a demonstration of our relationship with God and each other. Paul explains this refashioning of relationship a few verses later in 3:26-28 “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, slave nor free, *male nor female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise” (NIV, italics mine). Paul's argument hinges on this statement that that in Christ we are all *sons*. He is not speaking of biology but of spiritual identity and inheritance (clearly seen by his bracketing the charge of “neither...male nor female” between this statement of sonship and the following statement of being heirs of Abraham). In Christ there is no longer the privileged Jew and the outsider Gentile, no longer the chains of slavery held by the free, no longer the elevated male and the subordinate female, but all are incorporated into the promises of Abraham and have full inheritance in God's family. In Colossians 2, Paul tells us that we “have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” because we are circumcised by Christ himself in baptism. Male/female hierarchy would thus be seen not in the creation accounts, but as a consequence of human sin. It is refashioned through baptism into equality before God, which brings an end of gender distinctiveness for ministry roles.

If the complementarians are correct, and that hierarchy is fundamental to creation so that manhood really means leadership and womanhood means followership, then this has implications beyond those generally acknowledged by the complementarians. One implication would be that *all* women are to be subordinate to *all* men in *all* situations. In other words, one would not limit followership merely to a church or the home because creation itself placed headship and submission into our very genders. Grudem and Piper admit this in their first chapter when John Piper writes,

*At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationship... Without passing any judgment on the appropriateness of any of these roles, one thinks of the following possible instances: Prime Ministers and her counselors and advisors, principals and the*

*teachers in her school, college teachers and her students, bus drivers and her passengers, bookstore managers and her clerks and stock helpers, staff doctors and her interns, lawyers and her aides, judges and the court personnel, police officers and citizens in her precinct, legislators and her assistants, TV newscasters and her editors, counselors and her clients.*

They conclude this way, "One or more of these roles might stretch appropriate expressions of femininity beyond the breaking point."

In other words, consistent with his perspective of created difference, Piper sows some level of doubt in Christian women concerning the appropriateness of being a college professor or a staff doctor. Then he works out his perspective of men and women's appropriate roles by eliminating personal directive roles from women over men and he states, "It would be hard to see how a woman could be a drill sergeant over a man without violating his sense of masculinity and her sense of femininity." Piper concludes by saying, "The God-given sense of responsibility for leadership in a mature man will not generally allow him to flourish long under personal directive leadership of a female superior."

Quoting J.I. Packer, he writes that, "A situation in which a female boss has a male secretary puts strain on the humanity of both." He believes this would be true in other situations as well;

*"Some of the more obvious ones would be in military combat settings, if a woman was positioned in order to deploy and command men, or in professional baseball, if a woman is made the umpire to call balls and strikes and frequently settles heated arguments among men. And I would stress that this is not necessarily owing to male egotism, but to a natural and good tension given by God."*

Consequently, you have to hold to what I believe is an incoherent position if you say that these differences between men and women are *created*, but you limit direction and leadership merely to the church and to home. If differences that bear on leadership are created, they ought to extend to the whole of life.

Against this view, God himself regularly violates the so-called creation pattern discerned by complementarians. If women were created to be followers and not leaders, then why would God ever choose a woman to lead? There should be no exceptions to the rule. There ought to be no Deborahs or Junias or Priscillas. If hierarchical relationship between men and women is part of our creation pattern, we should see no exceptions to that rule.

In my mind, Grudem and Piper are doing an enormous disservice to Christian women by sowing doubt in their minds concerning the appropriateness of taking directive roles. In effect they are, unintentionally perhaps, laying burdens on women like the Pharisees did with the common people.

## **5. The Bible should be interpreted in ways that promote the spread of the gospel.**

It is incontrovertible that the biblical world was thoroughly male-dominated and hierarchical. Commands that are given are not detached from the world to which those commands are addressed. The ultimate concern of the biblical writers concerning appropriate social roles is the promotion or hindrance of the gospel. This concept runs through 1 Peter; wives are to act in a certain way so as to win their non-Christian husbands. Likewise, in Titus, Paul commands older women to train “younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, “so that no one will malign the Word of God.” Again in Titus, Paul teaches young men to be self-controlled and Timothy to set an example for them “so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.”

Finally, Paul teaches slaves to be subject to their masters, to try to please them, to not talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, “so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.”

Virtually all of the commands concerning women’s roles are set in the context of limiting feminine freedom in order to not hinder others from accepting the gospel. Another example can be seen in 1 Corinthians Paul commands women to wear a head covering and to wear long hair in accordance with the social custom of the day. Why? Because he wants women to limit their freedom so as to avoid anything that might obstruct the gospel. He wants women’s worship practice not to involve any appearance that would be considered shameful or disgraceful.

In looking at the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Empire, we see two overlapping patterns of appropriate roles for women. First there was a moralistic view that women should not express themselves visually or vocally in public because that would be a disgrace. Secondly there was a hostile view of women who might lose control of their emotions and so should be kept in their place.

So for Paul, the whole issue of head coverings and women’s hair is entirely an issue of propriety and custom. Thus when Paul says, “Doesn’t nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. Long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice, nor do the churches of God.” By nature, Paul is not referring to creation. Paul means the natural feelings of their contemporary culture.

Paul had given up his rights for the sake of the gospel. He called upon the Corinthians to give up their rights to eat meat sacrificed to idols for the sake of the gospel, and then he called upon women to give up their rights so as not to create scandal for the sake of the gospel. But giving up rights for the sake of the gospel in one specific culture at one specific time is different than one group’s subordination to another group for all time and for all purposes.

Similarly, 1 Tim. 2 is set in the context of what is socially appropriate. The context of 1 Tim. 2:11-15 is 1 Tim. 2:9-10. Paul writes, "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship God." 1 Tim. 2:9-10 is concerned with the propriety of women's dress in Greco-Roman society. The Greeks wrote a great deal about what was socially appropriate for women to wear. It particularly focused upon women's hair and jewelry.

Is it a universal instruction for women to wear head coverings, to not braid their hair, to not cut their hair, or to not wear gold jewelry? Some Pentecostal and Mennonite groups believe this as well as many Third World Christians. Ladies, if you cut your hair are you violating scripture? Of course not! Is a man's long hair or ponytail a rejection of God's creation? Absolutely not! The basic biblical rule is to *live out our freedom in Christ in a way that is neither culturally offensive nor unstrategic to the spread of the gospel*. Paul said there is neither Jew nor Greek in Galatians 3:28, yet he was willing to become like either to win Jews and Greeks. He desired no offense to either Jews or Greeks that they may be saved. He also affirmed that there is neither slave nor free, but he encouraged slaves to be subject to their masters so that the gospel could be spread.

Paul desired equality. He could be enormously flexible in different cultural settings. He had coworkers who were women and he let women teach men in different contexts. He often mentioned that women were of great value to him in spreading the gospel. And women apparently exercised leadership in some of Paul's churches.

Here's how I would summarize this point: There is no biblical prohibition against women teaching or leading in the church. All roles are open including those of senior pastor and elder if you are gifted and called by God. But the role that a woman chooses depends on the culture in which she lives and whether her exercise of leadership or teaching would promote or hinder the gospel.

In the Western world, the New Testament would offer enormous liberty, particularly for example, in a university town or in most urban areas. In fact, in my opinion, the gospel is *hindered* if it is communicated to 21<sup>st</sup> century women that they are automatically barred from roles of leadership or authoritative teaching because of their gender. On the other hand, if a woman exercises her God-given liberty in a village in India, or in the Muslim world where the liberating message of Christianity has not yet penetrated, this would create a great stumbling block to the gospel.

## **6. The Bible should be interpreted in ways that are not inherently incoherent or illogical.**

What this means is that a view cannot be God's eternal will when it is fraught with inconsistencies and multiple contradictions and cannot be followed. I mentioned earlier that one of the reasons I began to re-explore women's roles in ministry is because of

the thoroughgoing inconsistency in evangelical practice. Virtually no one can live with the stated assumption that all women are created to be subordinate to all men in all realms. Nor can anyone even live with the more limited assumption that women may not teach or exercise authority over men in the church. What is teaching anyway? Is writing a Bible commentary teaching? Is teaching a seminary class teaching? Is a woman teaching “men” when she teaches 14-year-old boys in a youth meeting?

So what we see is Evangelicals redefining the word “teaching” and “leading” (found in 1 Timothy 2:11). A woman may not teach, but she may “share” her insights with appropriate biblical illustrations and exhortations. Or a woman may teach “under the covering and leadership of a man.” Or a woman may teach in a conference setting, but not on Sunday morning. Or, like Ann Graham Lotz, a woman may not be permitted to teach from the stage at the Southern Baptist Convention, but from the floor. Or she may be able to teach from her personal experience, but not from the Bible. Or she can do marriage seminars, in which she teaches men, but she can’t otherwise teach doctrine. Or a woman is permitted to be a missionary and teacher overseas, but not in America. (Remember, 60% of all missionaries are women. They regularly are teaching and leading men.) The last principle strikes me as potentially racist. It is like a church in Texas that forbids instruments in their Anglo services because they are non-instrumental, but permits instruments for their Hispanic services, since Hispanics are more emotional and consequently need instruments.

Equally incoherent is the traditional Vineyard view that women can be pastors, but not senior pastors. Nothing in Paul’s statements about women not teaching or exercising authority over a man would permit one form of teaching or authority, but not another. Either the rule in 1 Timothy 2:11 ought to be interpreted as universally binding in all places and at all times and in all situations, or it was a command for a specific church, because of a specific situation arising in that church.

Another perspective that is incoherent is the view that the Bible establishes a universal rule, but permits exceptions in unusual circumstances. Thus, when Sarah Sumner, a seminary professor and author asked whether she was violating scripture, she was told that she was an exception to the rule. Likewise, Deborah is seen as an exception, as are many other gifted women. Ann Watson was an exception for John Wimber. It appears to me that these exceptions are all ways to weasel out of a rule, which by its very nature is impossibly restrictive.

Virtually every book by complementarian authors that I’ve read sets up some sort of subjective grid that meets the comfort level of the author. Just read James Hurley or Grudem & Piper and try to apply their grids. It would take a massive computer program to do so. In the meantime, women are wounded in conscience by constantly wondering if they are violating God’s will by taking on a certain role.

To apply these criteria would take the form of creating an entirely new Talmud, deciding that it would not be okay for a woman to teach in a Bible study when her husband is present, but okay if her husband is not present. Or to use a real example from Grudem

and Piper, it is okay for a woman to be a bus driver, since her authority is not directive or personal, but it may be inappropriate for a woman to be an attorney and have a male paralegal working for her.

These grids have no root in the Biblical text. Again and again the complementarians accuse egalitarians of being “unbiblical” yet there are many statements by complementarians like the ones I quotes that have no biblical support to back them up. And there is the rather astounding assertion made by John Piper that egalitarian relationships will lead to “more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide.” Does Piper possess any serious sociological studies to support this extraordinary claim? Is he basing this extremely damning assertion upon private revelation? Further, where in scripture do we see that female leadership will result in such chaos? Where is the scriptural evidence for some of these standards to measure whether or not a female is asserting too much directive authority? Where in Scripture does God ask us to pursue “biblical manhood” or “biblical womanhood”? Holy Scripture does not place humanity in the position of making obedience to its commands impossible. The Bible does not lay out incoherent rules nor does it require a Talmud to correctly interpret it.

### **7. The Bible ought to be interpreted in ways that maximize opportunities for ministry and service.**

Here’s a very simple rule. If you are in doubt because of the multiplicity of views, it seems to me that you ought to resolve your doubts in favor of opening doors of opportunity and ministry for people, not closing doors. There ought to be an extremely heavy burden of proof, something like proof required to sentence a person to jail or to death in a criminal case, in other words, proof beyond a reasonable doubt, before we arrive at a rule that 51% of the human race is permanently prohibited from exercising overall leadership in the church. Why resolve the dispute in favor of restriction? I would rather not oppose what God may be doing through a gifted woman by barring the door than err in permitting a woman from leading even though she is gifted and effective and feels called.

## Appendix #1

### 1 Timothy 2:11-15 – The Missional Purpose of the Pastorals

(an abridged argument from David DeSilva in *An Introduction to the New Testament*)

This passage has one of the most extensive bibliographies of any single text of Scripture. These commentaries are largely committed to promoting one of two positions. First, that 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is a perpetually valid ordinance regarding the proper place of women in the church and home. Second, that the text is a concession to patriarchal society in an attempt to make the early church blend in and support common social and cultural values in order to avoid unnecessary hostility and slander.

As we read 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in the context of the pastoral epistles we understand 1 Timothy and also the instructions throughout Titus to reveal a concern that the Christians should present the best possible face to Greco-Roman society and live in a manner that promotes the reputation of the Christian movement. In other words, the apostle Paul displays an overriding missional concern throughout. The motive clauses used to promote certain kinds of behavior point strongly in this direction:

“so as to give the opponent no occasion for slander”

“in order that God’s name and the teaching might not be slandered”

“in order that the word of God might not be slandered”

“in order that the opponent might be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us”

“in order that they might adorn the teaching of our Savior God in everything”

The author promotes behaviors and attitudes that will reinforce an image of Christians as people who support and respect the social order, steering away from behaviors that might appear subversive, where subversion is nonessential. The Christian movement would always be seen to subvert traditional religion in its abhorrence of idolatry and the worship of any god save the God of Israel. The Christian group could, however, offset the tendency for their neighbors to view them as an enemy of the social order. The author of 1 Timothy wants Christians to see themselves as friends of the *pax Romana*, supporting that peace through their prayers and by their leading unobjectionable, exemplary lives. Far from being subversive of the social order, Christians will show themselves submissive to that order at every level.

For example, Christian leaders are summoned to instruct slaves to model the qualities of obedience and respect towards their masters, whether those masters are Christians or not. By such conduct they will clarify that Christianity is not a revolutionary movement that breeds revolt and threatens the fundamental bedrock of the Greco-Roman economy—slave labor. Older women are enjoined to teach the younger women to embody the Greco-Roman ideal of the “virtuous wife,” which combines submissiveness to the husband, modesty in dress and demeanor, silence (“invisibility”) in public, and competent diligence in the management of domestic concerns.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 grows organically out of 1 Timothy 2:9-10, developing further the author's vision of what the non-Christian society will affirm as proper, respectable conduct on the part of Christian women. For the sake of the group's reputation the author insists that women not cease to model the ideal of submissiveness and silence when the church gathers. Whenever non-Christians might observe Christians, the impression must be made that Christians embody traditional social and domestic values rather than overturning them. Even though Paul presents theological warrants to support his instructions (1 Timothy 2:13-14), it is not Paul's understanding of God's revealed will for husbands and wives that drives these instructions. Rather, these instructions are *missional*. The theological rationales are driven by the larger agenda of building bridges between the Christian culture and the larger society that will in turn assist the church to win the battles that Paul deems essential. This purpose can also be seen in the author advising the younger widows to marry, continue in the role of child-raising and manage their households well. By stepping back into such a role, the Christian widow's behavior will conform to the expectations of non-Christians regarding virtuous women.

In addition to conforming Christian behavior to core political and domestic ideals of the Greco-Roman society, the Pastoral Epistles also seek to shape Christians who will embody the ethical ideals of that culture. In this way, the Christians' winsome behavior will provide the witness of a virtuous life that will contribute to the positive value of the Christian gospel, while maintaining the group's differing convictions about the nature of and loyalty to the one God made known in Christ.

As the author lays out how local Christian leaders are to instruct various segments of their congregation, central virtues of Greco-Roman ethics emerge regularly. Christians are to model self-control and temperance, reverence, prudence, and fortitude. Most non-Christians would readily recognize and approve these virtues and goals. This would hopefully contribute to a positive (re-)assessment of the Christian movement as a whole.

A contemporary application of the Apostle Paul's approach to the social order might be counsel that we might give to Christians living in China. The great fear of the Chinese government is that Christians may, because of their prior loyalties to Christ and each other, subvert the state's authority. Thus we might, along with the Apostle Paul, advise Chinese Christians to show support for the government by praying for their leaders, to be hard-working, dependable, enthusiastic employees, to not participate in revolutionary activities – in other words – to be model citizens (to the extent this does not conflict with scriptural commands or prohibitions). All of this counsel would be part of an overriding missional agenda designed to promote the Christian movement and to further the gospel.

A contemporary application of the Apostle Paul's specific counsel to women in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 might be to require Christian women in a Pakistani rural village to be veiled in public, to show no public affection to their husbands, and to refrain from publicly communicating with men who are not family members. On the other hand, 1

Timothy 2:11-15 would not keep women in most American or western European communities from serving in any ministry role since the reputation of the Christian church would not be damaged by such service. In America, because we have a government of the people, by the people and for the people, the issues of challenging the social order are more subtle and complex. Since “we the people” make up the government and because our society has adopted an egalitarian ethos, missional concerns would drive an inclusive, open, non-restrictive approach to women in ministry roles.

In sum, 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is to be read to be consistent with the overriding missional concern of the Pastoral Epistles.

## **Appendix # 2**

### **The Meaning of Headship in 1 Corinthians 11**

One of the most difficult texts regarding men’s and women’s roles in the church is 1 Corinthians 11. There is uncertainty concerning the meaning of a host of phrases in the text including the words “head” (vv. 3-5), “uncovered” (vv. 5-13), “glory” (v. 7), “authority over her head” (v. 10), “because of the angels” (v. 10), “in place of a shawl or covering” (v. 15), and “nature itself” (v. 14).

Perhaps the most significant dispute concerns the meaning of the word “head.” Piper and Grudem view the term “head” (*kephale*) as being best translated as “authority over,” “ruler,” or “leader.” Thus they read v. 3, “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” as teaching a chain of command. They conclude the authority or ruler over every man is Christ, the authority or ruler of the woman is man, and the authority or ruler of Christ is God.

There are three reasons to reject this chain of command view of 1 Corinthians 11. First, the links are out of sequence. Paul proceeds from Christ, to women, to men, and then to God. He doesn’t start with, “the head of Christ is God, the head of man is Christ, and the head of woman is man.” The second, and main reason to reject the argument is that the rest of what Paul argues doesn’t fit a chain of command structure i.e. the rest of the context of 1 Corinthians 11 is not based on the issue of ruling and leading.

Third, many church fathers vehemently rejected the notion that *kephale* would be translated “authority” or “ruler over” as it applies to Christ, because that would make Christ eternally subordinate to God the Father. Catherine Kroeger in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* quotes Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Eusebius (the Father of Church History) as rejecting an interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:3 that placed Christ in a subordinate position relative to the Father.

In view of scriptures ascribing co-equality of Christ with the Father, John Chrysostom (the most honored Apostolic Father in the Eastern Orthodox Church) declared, “Only a heretic would understand Paul’s use of ‘head’ to mean ‘chief’ or ‘authority over.’” Rather,

one should understand the term as implying ‘absolute oneness and cause and primal source.’”

A question arises concerning headship as “authority over.” Even if one does see some sort of divine order in the word “head” as Grudem argues in his massive search of the Lexicons, we still need to determine what “authority” in the Bible is used for. In other words, if one finds an element of leadership or authority or ruling in the word “head,” how does leadership or authority or rulership function in the New Testament context? If God is seen as the ruler of Christ (which raises substantial Trinitarian issues) how does God exercise his rulership or leadership?

We see God exercise his authority or rulership by lifting up Jesus to a position of co-equality and co-rulership, so that “at the name of Jesus every knee would bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord.” God exalts Jesus to the position of co-equal ruler of the universe so that in the Apostle John’s vision of the throne of God in heaven, he sees not only God on the throne, but “I saw a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne.” The Gospel of John tells us that God has given Jesus all judgment. We also read that God has given Jesus the power to give life to whomever the Son is pleased to give it. The purpose of sharing the power of the resurrection and the authority to judge is so “that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.”

What does this mean for the headship of a husband and wife? Even if one reads in “authority” or “leadership,” or “rulership,” or “government” into the word “head” the leadership or rulership, or authority of the husband is to be exercised so as to exalt his wife to a position of co-equality and co-rulership so that all would honor the wife even as they do the husband. This use of authority to lift up the subordinate one is found in Ephesians 5:25-28 where Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wife just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing of water through the Word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle, or any blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.” The purpose of any “leadership” is to lift up, to honor, and to exalt the subordinate person.

An alternative reading of the word “head” advocated by many interpreters including Gordon Fee is that “head” means “source,” or “source of life.” Gordon Fee says that in 1 Corinthians 11, “Paul’s concern is not hierarchical, (who has authority over whom), but relational (a unique relationship that is predicated upon one’s being the source of the other’s existence.)” The argument for head as source works well inasmuch as Adam is clearly seen as Eve’s source in 1 Corinthians 11:8 where Paul writes, “For man did not come from woman, but woman from man.”

Given this statement, it is possible that Paul speaks of the man as his wife’s source, just as Christ had created Adam and later proceeded from the Father in his incarnation, in which case 1 Corinthians 11:3 is a chronological sequence. The source of every man is

Christ (Genesis 2), the source of the woman is the man (Genesis 2ff), and the source of Christ (in his incarnation) is God.

Once Paul has made his argument about sources, he reverses fields and says that it is true that woman comes from man, but it is also true that man comes from woman as his source. The point is that both are really interdependent on one another in the Lord; “however, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman, for as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” Paul does not want the argument to be pressed too far. He ultimately concludes his argument with a question of propriety and the custom of their contemporary culture.

A third possible meaning for the word “head” and one that makes a great deal of sense has been suggested by Walter Liefeld. *Kephale* can mean ruler or authority over; *kephale* can also mean source or origin, but *kephale* was used in the New Testament to refer to the eminent or most honored part of the body. Essential to the flow of thought in 1 Corinthians 11 is the prominent vocabulary of “glory” and “honor” and also of “shame” and “disgrace.” In this context, it makes sense to understand *kephale* as meaning “the prominent or honored member.” Christ receives glory or shame from man, man receives glory or shame from woman, and God receives (only) glory from Christ.

As one reads through 1 Corinthians 11, the issue of glory and disgrace keeps coming up. Paul’s underlying concern is that Christians maintain an orderly worship that brings glory to God, and does not incur disgrace through practices or appearances that were considered shameful. These considerations of headship and the avoidance of shame are brought together in the idea of glory. Women can bring glory or shame to their head (their husbands) just as their husbands can bring glory or shame to their head, namely Christ.

In conclusion, a way of understanding headship is that honor or respect is to be brought to one’s head. Thus the issue of “headship” and “submission” in marriage is not an issue of leadership and followership, but is an issue of respect and honor. The relevant question, then, for a woman is not, “How do I obey my husband, or follow him?” The relevant question is, “How do I honor my husband and show him respect?” In other words, how can I act in 21<sup>st</sup> century culture that doesn’t bring “my head” (my husband) disrespect or dishonor? There is nothing in 1 Corinthians 11 that would limit the appropriate ministry role of a woman. And because of its massive ambiguity, there is nothing that automatically gives men leadership or rulership over a woman from 1 Corinthians 11.

### **Appendix #3**

#### **1 Corinthians 14**

What does Paul mean when he says, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women shall 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.”

D.A. Carson suggests that what is being prohibited is women orally weighing prophecies because that is a role of authority by “the law.” Paul is referring to Genesis 2, which implies (in Carson’s mind) a specific order regarding men and women.

Gordon Fee suggests that these verses may not even be authentic. In other words, they are not part of the original text, but were an early gloss. These verses have very little to do with the main argument of the text. They also are in direct contradiction to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 concerning women having the power to prophecy in church. How can women prophecy, if they are to remain silent?

Craig Keener and Stan Grenz argue that these verses should be part of the text, but there is nothing in these verses that forbid women from interpreting prophecy, teaching, or any other role. They suggest that women in the church were interrupting the scriptural exposition by asking questions. Women in that day would have been less educated and would therefore have asked questions due to their ignorance. But this is not a transcultural principle in the same way that “they should eat at home” does not mean that one could never eat in a church building. Thus, “they should ask their husbands at home” does not mean that women can never speak in church. 1 Corinthians 14 offers no limitations on women’s roles in the church.

## **Appendix #4**

### **Appropriate Analogies and Inappropriate Analogies:**

#### **The Issue of Slavery**

Piper and Grudem say that unlike slavery, order between man and woman was established at creation. The existence of slavery is not therefore rooted in creation. God merely regulated slavery to remove some of its harshness. They believe that slavery is inappropriately analogized to female subordination to men. But slavery is a perfect analogue to women’s subordination to men. Egalitarians would argue that subordination wasn’t part of creation, marriage was. Slavery was not part of creation, work was. Marriage was distorted by the Fall. It is the Fall that gave rise to destruction of the co-equality of men and women with husbands ruling over their wives and it is the Fall that distorted work by allowing people to economically exploit others through slavery.

The biblical arguments in favor of slavery are actually stronger than the biblical arguments for restricting women’s roles in the church. For example, slavery appears in the Ten Commandments. We are not to covet our neighbor’s manservant or maidservant. Slavery was practiced by the patriarchs. Slavery was strongly endorsed by the apostles. In all of the so-called household code texts that involve husbands, wives, parents, and children, we read about slaves. Thus we read texts like “Teach

slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.” Southern slave owners loved verses like this. Or consider Ephesians 6:5ff:

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.*

How could slaves rebel or demand freedom in light of Ephesians 6:5-8? Having a Christian master did not change the issue of slavery. We read in 1 Timothy 6:1-2:

*All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers, instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them.*

Finally, slaves were even to endure beatings without complaint. “Slaves, submit yourself to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh...how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good, and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”

Arguments that were raised by abolitionists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would dismiss the many Bible scholars of the time as violating the clear commands of scripture. Scholars such as Princeton's Charles Hodge suggested that abolitionists were violating God's divine order, an order that he saw in male/female relationships, and an order that he saw in master/slave relationships. Slaves were to be subservient and content with their lot in life because this is how they were to serve Christ. Thus, the pro-slavery argument was supposedly grounded in God's unchanging moral law, accepted by Jesus, unambiguously endorsed by the apostles.

The fundamental suggestion was that 1<sup>st</sup> century social order was permanently instituted and it was maintained by God for all time. But the arguments I used in interpreting scripture above were used by the abolitionists to promote a different interpretation of these various texts. They asserted that authority structures and social order can change with various cultures and the social ordering of people is cultural. Their conclusion was that the apostles' main goal was the promotion of the gospel. But when the gospel has penetrated a society, it can advocate a change in the social ordering.

## The Issue of Homosexuality

Some say that making 1 Timothy 2 or other texts limited to the culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century opens the door to the possibility of the church ordaining gays or lesbians. This argument has certainly been used by many mainline churches. Unfortunately this kind of logic is extremely weak. As William Webb points out in his book *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*, “Just because *some* things in Scripture are cultural, that doesn’t mean that *everything* in Scripture is cultural.” Some may feel concerned that if the 7 principles outlined above, and in fact many principles of hermeneutics in cultural analysis, are used to interpret scripture, there could be an open door to ordain or endorse homosexual practice. Let me outline just three distinctions that can be made when doing a cultural analysis of the women and homosexual issues. I am taking these points directly from William Webb’s book *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*. I highly recommend the book if you are interested in digging deeper into this issue.

First, when the bible speaks about women, it is largely operating within the cultural consensus of patriarchy. Scripture makes no attempt to completely overturn this institution (such an act might have been detrimental to society at the time) but rather offers some preliminary movement towards more equal treatment of women. This approach made provision for further movement while requiring little disruption for the sake of a secondary issue. Homosexuality is completely different. In radical contrast to the prevalent acceptance of homosexuality in the ancient Near Eastern world, the Old Testament rejects all homosexual practice. This rejection of homosexual practice is continued in the New Testament as Christians again in radical contrast to widespread cultural acceptance (in the Greco Roman world). This is clearly a movement in the opposite direction than the surrounding culture, and leaves no room for further development. In sum, homosexual practice is strictly condemned in the Bible despite widespread cultural acceptance. This indicates that such practice ought to be condemned to day despite widespread contemporary cultural acceptance.

Second, there exists in the Bible “seed ideas” that suggest and encourage further movement in an area. The texts that produce this effect for women such as Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 are as Webb puts it “quietly suggestive” as they plant a seed of possible further freedom and equality for women. There exist no similar texts that suggest freedom and further acceptance of homosexual practice.

Finally, there exists in scripture a phenomenon that Webb calls “breakouts” in which the text completely overturns the cultural norms. These breakouts continue the preliminary movement found elsewhere in the scriptures. Here is where we would place examples of women leading and taking authority like Deborah, Huldah, Junia and Pricilla even though the culture strongly discouraged it. There exist no similar texts that support homosexual leadership and practice.

The Bible clearly draws a distinct line between moral prohibitions and rules pertaining to our cultural and social relationships. When the Bible calls something sin, it is sin for everyone, everywhere, and for all time. Homosexual sex, adultery, and premarital sex

will always remain sin no matter how frequent or popular their practice becomes. A biblical church may never ordain a person who is committed to the practice of sexual sin.