

The Role of Women in the Church

Affirmations and Denials

We affirm that there is but one living and true God, who is one in essence, while eternally existing in three distinct personalities: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though each person of the Godhead possesses the same nature, each functions differently in respect to God's dealing with man (Dt. 6:4). We deny the heresy called 'modalism,' which represents God as one person who takes on different personalities when dealing with humanity.

We affirm God the Father is the first person of the Trinity orders and directs all things according to His own purpose, pleasure and grace. (Eph 1:3-6)

We affirm Jesus Christ to be the eternally co-existing Son of God who became fully man without ceasing to be fully God. Though equal in nature with the Father, He submits Himself to the Father in all things (John 5:19-24). We deny that submission to the Father makes the Son less (John 10:30).

We affirm the full person and deity of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19, 1 Cor 2:10-11). We affirm that the Holy Spirit takes His direction from the Father and Son (John 14:16-17, John 15:26). We deny that submission to the Father and Son makes the Spirit less.

We affirm that the nature of the hierarchy within the Godhead is meant to glorify the nature of God and is part of His essential nature. We deny that hierarchy within the Trinity is an anthropomorphism, or way to explain God in human terms.

We affirm that both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). We affirm that this incarnation of the image is complete in 'male' and 'female' and that both play critical roles in its expression. We affirm that male and female are equal in Creation. We deny that this makes men and women equivalent.

We affirm that men were created to represent the 'headship' within the Godhead and that women were created to represent the 'submissive' within the Godhead (1 Cor 11:3, Eph 5:24). We deny that this makes men superior or women inferior.

We affirm that both men and women have fallen into sin and are born separated from God (Rom 3:23). We affirm although Eve sinned first (Gen 3:6, 1 Tim 2:14), because of his position of leadership, sin is reckoned to humanity through Adam (Rom 5:21). We deny that one gender is more responsible for sin than the other.

We affirm that both men and women are redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ, and this through individual faith (Rom 10:9-10). We deny that there is any distinction between the sexes in regards to redeeming grace (1 Pet 3:7).

We affirm that both men and women, upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that occurs at conversion, are joined as members to the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor 12:27, Gal 3:28). We affirm that both genders have equal access to God. We deny that there is a 'preferred' gender.

We affirm that both men and women, upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the admission to the Church that follows, are given spiritual gifts, each by the will and decision of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7). We deny that any one gift is more important than another, although some might be more public (1 Cor 12:4-26).

We affirm that spiritual gifts are given for the good of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the building up of its members (1 Cor 12:7).

We affirm that the sole authority within the Church is the Risen Lord Jesus (Eph 5:23).

We affirm that the visible authority structure within the Church is to be a group of elders (1 Tim 3:4-5).

We affirm that the office of elder is to be limited to men (1 Tim 3:2).

We affirm that there is but one method of Bible interpretation-the literal, or historical-grammatical method. This method recognizes the fact that the authors of Scripture meant what they said. Therefore, we consistently apply the rules of grammar, literature, history, and culture to Scripture in order to unlock and understand the author's meaning. We deny the 'trajectory' or 'enlightenment' hermeneutic (2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:20-21, Gal 5:10, Phil 3:15). Trajectory and enlightenment hermeneutics are the set of ideas that interprets the Bible through 'current' or 'more modern' beliefs and cultural norms. In other words, we are to take our values and ideals *from* the Bible, not read the Bible *through* them.

The Role of Women within the Church

Summation

There is no distinction between men and women within the Body of Christ in regards to standing, importance, membership, privilege, or gifting. There are distinctions between men and women within the Body of Christ with regards to office and authority. The distinctions are made because of created order and not based on gifting, ability or a superior gender. Both men and women are called to whole-heartedly serve the Church with the spiritual gift(s) given them by the Holy Spirit.

God and Creation

The central premise of the Creation is the manifestation of the glory of God. In other words, God created all things in order to better show the fullness of who He is and the nature of His being. Any method of discerning the Creation that removes the glory of God as the central tenet of the creative act and replaces it with another value (for example- human pleasure, happiness) seriously damages all attempts at truthfully divining God's purposes.

Created Order

Both men and women were created by God to be the bearers of His image within Creation. Since God is neither male nor female, we understand that both sexes uniquely portray aspects of the Divine Nature and Person. We do not agree with the position that claims that both sexes portray the Divine Nature similarly, known as egalitarianism. We affirm that both sexes were created to show the nature of God in ways that complement one another, known as complementarianism. It is within this 'equal but different' matrix that the image of the Triune God, who exists as three persons with identical nature, is best represented. God exists in a relational hierarchy with the Father existing in the place of priority, followed by the Son and Spirit. While the Son and Spirit submit to the Father, they are not less than He. Male and female, as image bearers of God, 'replicate' this picture of God. We thus believe that this structure of authority was intended within the Creation to best represent the structure of authority within the nature of God. This human structure of authority does not exist in and of itself, but within the contexts of covenantal relationships.

Covenantal Relationships

Male headship is most prominently on display within covenantal relationships as designed by God, such as the marital and within the church. In marriage, the husband is to be the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands as to the Lord. This is not an avenue for male domination, but a means to the ends of the representation of the glory of God. We can see that men are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. As with the marriage relationship, within the church the visible authority structure is to be male. Paul gives descriptions of the ‘elder/overseers’ of the church and the descriptions are such that only males would qualify. This is consistent with the teaching of marriage that Paul has engaged in. It would not be feasible or consistent for a man to lead his wife at home, but submit to her within the church. God’s call for these covenantal relationships to glorify Him requires that they be ordered, as God is ordered.

Offices within the Church

Paul’s call for order within the Church (1 Cor) lends itself to a basic understanding of the need for and God’s establishment of authority structures in the Church. As previously discussed, the visible authority in the church is to be a group of elders, men set aside with the task of leading. If we understand Jesus’ appointing of the Apostles with the task of the formation and oversight of the church, we can see the modern day elder as the ‘link’ to the establishing authority of Jesus. With the Bible as an infallible guide, elders are to continue in the tradition and teaching of the apostles, something affirmed by Paul in his letters. This is why part of the elders’ task is to teach. They are to be seen as men counted worthy of the continuation of the line of apostolic teaching. Paul thus rightly limits authority and teaching to men, in part to secure the image of the Godhead present in the Creative Act, in part to assure the lineage of apostolic authority.

Women and Teaching

It is within these structures that the question of women’s roles regarding teaching comes to bear. That women are to teach is unquestioned. Paul commands them to teach younger women. That they are to play a role in teaching children is a bedrock principle of the family structure. Nowhere does Paul allude that the spiritual gift of teaching is limited to men, thus the Holy Spirit Himself anoints and gives favor to women He anoints as teachers. Paul does give a very precise statement that he does not allow women to teach or have authority over men. Given his qualifications for and understanding of men as the authority bearers in the church, this should

not be surprising. *The difficulty in interpreting and implementing Paul's statement that women should not teach men lies in the proper interpretation and application of these separate but equal truths: a) men are to be in authority within the church, b) women are not to be in authority over men, c) women are gifted to teach.* The basic questions are: when does a woman's teaching infringe on and violate the structure of male leadership? Is this a blanket statement basically saying women shouldn't speak in front of men, as 1 Cor would seem to argue? Given the call to women to teach children, one would have to ask when a woman's teaching of males would cross the same line. For example, the same question would be made regarding a woman's son, whom she would presumably 'teach' her whole life. Careful consideration would also have to be given to the difference between 'teaching' and 'prophesying' or 'edification,' which Paul does not forbid to women.

'Authority Over' and 'Teach'

The nature and essence of the issue crystallizes in 1 Tim 2:12, where Paul says that he forbids a woman to 'teach' or 'have authority over' a man. While the linguistic and grammatical issues in the original language are many and are often debated, suffice it to say that the single issue behind the issues is simple. Whether or not these are separate entreaties or a single commandment, there is a common point that brings Paul to link these two verbs. They are not *non sequiturs*, or two words that have nothing to do with one another. The issue is: at what point does a woman's activities within a church, including teaching, place her into the role of the *primary* authority in the church?

Obviously, the second of the two admonitions is the more plain. The Greek *authenteo*, translated 'to exercise authority over' in the ESV, is the word pertaining to a master over a worker. The exact semantic range of the word in Paul's vocabulary is impossible to track as this is the only time the word appears in the New Testament. In classical Greek (different than the Koine Greek of the Bible) it could mean to murder. One could say that it meant, in Paul's Koine Greek time, to lord over someone to the point that they cease to exist. The exact semantic range of the word in Paul's vocabulary is impossible to track as this is the only time the word appears in the New Testament. We can deduce some of Paul's meaning by watching where he goes after mentioning the concept. Immediately after saying women should not be in authority over men and finishing his thoughts on women and men, Paul begins to describe what authority in the church should look like with his description of elders. Paul understands the elder, an office he strictly limits to men, as the authority in the church. Paul's line for the behavior of women within the church is such that they should not be exercising any action that would confuse them with an elder. Paul's insistence that an elder be able to teach (1 Tim 3:2) shows why he links the concept of teaching with the concept of authority. In prohibiting the exercising of authority of women over men, he must also limit the type of teaching that elders are to engage.

The Greek word used by Paul in the Timothy text for ‘teach’ is the word *didasko*. It is used more than 90 times in the New Testament, the great majority coming in the Gospels and Acts and being descriptive of the activity of Jesus and the disciples. In Greek, the “*dida-*” family of word is used to denote the formal doctrine of a belief system of the teaching of that doctrine. Examples of this family are: *didaskalia* (doctrine; what is taught), *didache* (doctrine; what has been taught), *didaskalos* (Master, Teacher- what Jesus is often called), *didaktos* (that which is teachable, the ‘stuff’ to be taught).

Part of the problem in navigating the relevant issues of 1 Tim 2:12 is the difference in English uses of the word ‘teach.’ If a woman were to be in the front of the room in a given gathering, we would use our common language to say that she is ‘teaching’ the class—this, of course, appears to violate the 1 Timothy directives. (Herein lies an example of the challenge we face as we present to our congregation, “This is what the Bible says.” The first question we must ask is: What does the Bible say to the original reader? From there we can communicate the text’s instructions to the present tense reader. Below is an attempt to differentiate between Paul’s usage of Greek words that we translate into the common word, “teach”.)

We should, however, consider a distinction Paul makes regarding the use of the Greek *dida* family of words in 2 Timothy. The relevance of the usage cannot be understated, as it is the same author writing to the same audience. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul is instructing Timothy in the proper uses of and relevance of the Scriptures. He writes:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (ESV)

Here *didaskalia* is linked to, but clearly differentiated from, *paideia*, or ‘training.’ The word *paideia* is also used for ‘instruction’ and ‘discipline.’ While in English, ‘teaching’ and ‘instruction’ are synonyms, it is apparent that Paul and the Greek language did not use them likewise. We would say that whoever was in the front of a room speaking to a group is the ‘teacher.’ We understand the semantic range of the word ‘teacher’ in our native tongue. But in the example given above, while a woman might be in front of the class, in order to evaluate the situation from Paul’s biblical perspective, we would have to differentiate between ‘teaching’ and ‘instruction,’ not to mention ‘reproving’ (*elenxis*) and ‘correcting’ (*epanorthosis*). Just because she was reading from the Bible would not by default mean that she was ‘teaching’ in the sense of Paul’s usage of *didasko*. The guiding principle for this would have to be an understanding of the linkage between what Paul considers ‘having authority’ and ‘teaching.’ While the woman might be ‘teaching’ the class, what she is doing might be what Paul would have labeled *paideia* or any of the other benefits he lists Scripture as accomplishing. She might not be in violation of Paul’s directive. In order to be in violation of the directive, she would have to be ‘teaching’ the class in the way that Paul would have labeled *didasko*.

So how can we better understand what Paul means when he uses the word *didasko*? The root word for *didasko* is also used in the New Testament to form the word for doctrine, *didache*. When Jesus is called “Teacher,” He is being called *didaskalos*, another cognate of the word. It is

interesting that older translations translated the word *didaskalos* as ‘Master.’ This gives us a more clear bridge between the idea of ‘to teach [*didasko*],’ in Paul’s time and why he would link it to ‘have authority over’ within the Timothy text. In our language usage, the concept of ‘to teach’ (*didasko*) might be more closely associated to the concept of ‘authoritative discipler.’

So in our example of a woman in the front of the classroom or meeting room, she might be instructing or exhorting men and women to follow the Scriptures, but *not* with the authority of an elder or authoritative discipler. Teaching from the Scriptures does not mean that a teacher is by default engaged in teaching that would have been categorized as *didasko*. To provide another specific example, the elder body has the authority to discipline or even exclude a church member or attendee; a person who is not an elder who is instructing does not and would not. Within the church the elder’s teaching is “binding” (authoritative). An instructor in a community group or in a gathering of the church does not have the authority to present teaching that is “binding” (*didasko*). The instructor can provide instructional teaching (*paideia*) with the Word, but the instruction does not carry the weight of the elder’s “binding” teaching. This provides consistency and continuity with Jesus’ choice of men as apostles and Paul’s choice of men as elders.

Women in the Corinth Church

When dealing with the issues raised in 1 Timothy, we must also look throughout the New Testament to find other related texts and their relation to the text in hand. Do they augment? Do they seemingly contradict? Can we use them to ‘triangulate’ a meaning and interpretation? A similar text to the 1 Timothy text occurs in 1 Cor 14:33-35. It reads:

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Cor 14:33-35, ESV)

The Corinthian text seems to go even further than the Timothy text in that it forbids women to even speak in the church, whether they are teaching or not. As with all Biblical texts, however, reading the full context can give us a clearer picture.

In 1 Cor 14, Paul wrapping up comments about the structure and order of church gatherings that he began in 1 Cor 11. The scope of these instructions runs everything from dress and head coverings to the Lord’s Supper to spiritual gifts. In essence, Paul is trying to help bring order to the gathering time of the church in Corinth. Corinth was a large city. The biggest city in Greece at the time, it was probably only second in size to Rome in the whole of the Roman Empire. It was a very wealthy city. It was a ‘new’ city, being only about 100 years old by the time Paul visited it. New, wealthy, large, cosmopolitan Corinth probably had one of the largest Christian churches of the time and Paul is trying to make sure that it runs smoothly. It would be remiss not to mention that practices in the Corinthian church would likely be seen as acceptable to other smaller churches and that as a port city, practices in Corinth could spread quickly.

We can very quickly eliminate the vast majority of potential meanings from the playing field regarding Paul’s admonition. Among the most important:

1. Is Paul forbidding women to speak at all with regards to spiritual issues? Answer: no. In 1 Cor 11:5, Paul mentions women speaking in prayer and prophecy.

2. Is Paul forbidding women to speak with regards to prophecy (his immediate context in 1 Cor 14)? Answer: no. As mentioned above, Paul previously in the letter mentions women prophesying

Paul's specific issue is the speaking of women *in the church*. Paul's statements in both verses 33 and 34 make it plain that the church is the specific setting of his meaning. In verse 33, Paul begins this section of his comments by giving a commonality of scope. It read "*as in all the churches of the saints.*" Verse 34 finishes the thought and the sentence by stating that women should be silent "*in the churches.*" Twice in the same sentence, Paul uses the qualifier of the church to be sure to limit this command, lest anyone falsely claim that women were to be silent as a general principle. We should note that 'command' is exactly the word Paul uses to describe these things, calling them a 'command from the Lord' in verse 37.

Paul's command to women does not occur as a random thought within the flow of 1 Corinthians. In fact, it follows a series of commands to be silent. In 1 Cor 13:28, Paul commands someone who would speak in tongues to be silent if there is no one there to interpret. Verse 30 commands a prophet to be silent if a revelation is made to another while they are waiting to speak. All of this is done so that 'all things may be done for building up' (v 26). He commands this order because 'God is not a God of confusion, but of peace' (v 33, the phrase immediately preceding our text). So we can clearly deduce that Paul's comments in 1 Cor 14 regarding women in the church are made in the context of desiring order within the church. The best way to define the categories of order in which Paul is thinking would be 'creation' order and 'ecclesiastical' (church) order. We have addressed both of these points in the discussion of the Timothy texts.

Interpretive Issues

No historical/grammatical interpretation of the 1 Timothy texts can be complete without a serious attempt to understand the nature of the false teaching Paul is calling Timothy to oppose and a basic understanding of the philosophical/religious context of Ephesus, Timothy's likely locale. Regarding both, we can make basic assumptions that women were at the core of both. In Ephesus, Artemis worship was a core of the cultural norms. We can see this from Acts' account of the Ephesians shouting down Paul for hours. More specifically to Paul's engagement of Christians, 2 Timothy gives us insight that the false teachers he was indicting preyed on women. That Paul is having to in one way address women's roles in general AND with regards to a specific issue in Ephesus cannot be overlooked.

Cultural Concerns in Biblical Application

When we are seeking to implement the Lord's truth into action, the constant tension is how we integrate what we know to be true into our culture. Paul makes clear and irrefutable concessions to culture, becoming like a Jew to Jews and a Greek to Greeks. Paul calls Christians to not worry about eating meat sacrificed to idols if it does not violate their conscience and to do

whatever is necessary to build the faith of the brothers. If our freedom in a cultural context impinges another brother or sister from growing out of a conflict of conscience, then we should limit ourselves out of love. With these guidelines in mind, the relevant issues in the 1 Timothy passage are as follows

The Absolutes (regardless of cultural context):

1. Apostolic and ecclesiastical, or church, authority in the New Testament is exclusively male.
2. Created order exists to magnify the Trinity and is an ‘above culture’ issue.
3. Christ, while overturning many cultural and religious values of the day, did not, even while radically engaging women for His time, culture and context, overturn or reinterpret the male-female paradigm.
4. Teaching is a gift of the Holy Spirit, delivered sovereignly to believers as the Spirit chooses. There is no ‘denial’ of the gift to women.
5. Women are commanded to teach in the New Testament.
6. All believers are called to edify the Church with the gifts they have been given.

The Relative (to be culturally applied):

1. The point at which women teaching becomes synonymous with ‘exercising authority.’
2. The understanding of how our culture would define ‘exercise authority.’

Women, Teaching and FEFC

It is with all of these factors (the creative order, created imagery, ecclesiastical order, ecclesiastical imagery, cultural concerns and implementation) in consideration that we suggest the following as the appropriate understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, the roles of women in the church and Biblical manhood and womanhood.

1. Men will routinely teach from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. Because of the egalitarian nature and position of our society, we cannot expect a newcomer to understand our *ethos* (fundamental character or spirit of a culture) regarding the complementarian nature of created order. Consistent male leadership from the pulpit will help establish this. Should an exception be made, it will be with clear oversight from the elders.
2. Because community groups depend on a deeper understanding of the FEFC ethos, women’s roles in teaching them will be allowed in certain situations. Community groups should be seen as a time to help deepen the understanding of God’s

intentions in ‘male and female’ and the resultant roles assigned. Community groups are also a time for encouragement and sharing, which should not be seen as equivalent to the ‘exercising of authority’ Paul forbids. Community groups should ultimately have male leadership- through volunteer or pastoral involvement. Community groups should hold these two ‘guidelines’ and walk them out with as much integrity as possible:

- a. Leadership within the church should be male, following the instructions of Christ and His servant Paul.
 - b. Women ministering in community groups, etc, should not be understood as authoritative, but a continuation of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the church through His gifts.
3. Women should be encouraged to vigorously pursue the gift of teaching if they feel the Holy Spirit has given them that gift. They should seek avenues to edify the body.

We at FEFC would understand that there is diversity of interpretations and implementations in these matters. We must, given the charge to shepherd the flock, make the best interpretive attempt possible, institute working structures accordingly and press on with the larger work of the church- the making of disciples. We would call no church ‘outside of Christ’ that instituted different applications of these issues. We would call no believer ‘outside of Christ’ that disagreed with certain portions of our understanding of the Biblical issues and applications regarding this topic. We would, however, call believers who have made FEFC home to submit themselves to this paradigm, limiting what they would consider their freedom in some ways or allowing others freedom they would not optimally embrace in other ways. This is not a call to blind, dumb obedience but to humble submission to one another for the peace and growth of FEFC.