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## FORWARD

This paper is a brief treatment on the issue of women in ministry. The role of women in ministry has been hotly debated for the last several decades. Articulate scholars espouse views on both sides of the fence. While Westwinds has a position on this issue, we feel strongly it shouldn't cause friction within the body of Christ, and yet we know that any position we take will cause problems with some.

In the spirit of love we remain resolved as a board and staff on this issue as detailed in the following pages. This is not meant to be an exhaustive overview of all the relevant passages nor of all the sidebars inherent in the issue. These are the relevant points we feel establish a formidable base upon which to establish our position on mutuality and equality between genders.

Additionally, it may be important for you to note that this paper represents a reversal in Westwinds' previous policy on the issue. Since our inception, Westwinds has never permitted women to serve in the highest levels of church leadership – namely that of either elder or teaching pastor. Beginning September 1, 2010 that ruling will be reversed based on a unanimous vote of approval by the present Westwinds' elder team: Dr. David McDonald, John Voelz, Bill Kingsbury, David Howard, Anil Joseph, Brad Kimpell, and James (Scott) Robertson.

I have researched this issue and rewritten this paper for use within our local church context. Any questions or comments can be directed to me through my assistant, Norma Racey ([norma.racey@westwinds.org](mailto:norma.racey@westwinds.org)).

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. David McDonald  
March 9, 2010

## ACKNOWLEDGING MY BIAS

I grew up in Vancouver BC,  
a cosmopolitan, metropolitan city of more than a million people  
comprising a diverse range of ethnic groups, cultural enclaves,  
and world commerce.

The issue of equality in all matters between men and women  
was settled in Vancouver a long time ago.

I grew up in a Pentecostal church,  
based in the Wesleyan holiness tradition that recognized  
women as full partners fully capable of holding every ecclesial  
position.

The issue of equality in all matters between men and women  
was settled in the Pentecostal/Wesleyan tradition a long time  
ago.

When I moved to Jackson, Michigan I was surprised to find out that  
there were some who felt strongly about limiting the role of women  
inside the church. I was doubly-surprised to find out that the church  
position I had just accepted was among those reserved for men. To be  
honest, I had always thought that limiting a women's leadership  
capacity within the church was anachronistic. I imagined that those  
few who felt like women shouldn't (or couldn't) faithfully fulfill each  
position in the church were the equivalent of ecclesial red-necks. I also  
imagined that they had all died out.

I was wrong on both counts.

First, I was wrong because there are many good and godly  
people who love Jesus and hold faithfully to the Scriptures who  
believe women should be limited in their ministry. Based on  
their interpretation of the Bible, they think God has ordained  
that women always be in a subordinate position to men – both  
in the home and in the church.

I could not disagree more (as will become plain).  
Furthermore, I strongly contend that this position is not  
just theologically problematic, but it also violates basic  
human rights and dignity. I think it's unjust that we  
limit their roles.

I digress. The point, however, that I want to make clear  
is simply that those who limit the role of women are not  
"red-necks" or "idiots" or "misogynists" or "woman-  
haters" or whatever else. All of the people I have

personally known who limit a woman's role in the church do so because they believe that's what the Bible teaches.

Of course, I'm convinced that is NOT what the Bible teaches, but the fact that their beliefs are based on their interpretation of Scripture deserves credit, respect, and some measure of thanksgiving. I wish all church conflicts arose from differing opinions on Scripture, rather than differing opinions on style, form, structure, or whatever else. At least when we disagree on an interpretation of the Bible we're all united in saying: what the Bible teaches matters most.

I also wrong about those who limit women in that I thought they'd all died out. I thought they were a small branch group who had dwindled away into myths and folklore. Again, I was surprised to learn that – in the United States, at least – this group is very active and at work to convince others that (while women may be able to enjoy God's pleasure and fulfill His purpose and destiny in their high and holy calling as mothers and wives) women simply cannot lead either churches or men.

There are two Scriptures that seem to limit the role of women within the church: 1 Corinthians 14.33-35 and 1 Timothy 2.11-15. I will deal with those passages in a moment, but first I'd like to answer an early objection from my opponents before I get into the main body of my argument.

## THE WRONG ANSWER STILL GETS SOMETHING RIGHT

| Given that at first blush 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy seem to limit the role of women, I have been asked how I could possibly consider my upbringing as anything other than un-biblical.

Meaning:

| *If the Bible says women can't lead,  
why do you think they could?*

Well, the way we answered that in my home church was different than the way I'm about to answer it in this paper. If and when this issue arose during my earlier years, we would simply re-frame those passages by pointing to Galatians 3.28:

[In Christ] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no 'male and female,' for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Our contention was that the old dividing lines were now no longer in play. To be fair, that's an overly simplistic understanding of this text. I am now fairly critical of how we used this piece from Galatians for three reasons:

1. This rather vague text is insufficient to countermand the plain teachings of two other texts. Even if Galatians was meant as a "balance" to 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, it doesn't work.
2. This text has nothing to do with public ministry – it concerns our salvation and our standing in Christ
3. Obviously, just because Paul says there is no "slave or free" doesn't mean that every slave who becomes a Christian can now just slip off his chains and walk around without any fear; likewise, Paul simply cannot mean that men cease to be men and women cease to be women because they become Christians. There must remain some difference between each of these parties even though it seems like he's saying those differences are somehow resolved.

I believe that Galatians 3.28 is about something else entirely; and yet, that 'something else' still has great bearing on the status of women in the church. My beliefs about the key significance of this passage can be summarized in 4 bullet points:

- Since Paul is obviously not suggesting that all differences between Jew/Greek, Slave/Free, Male/Female are abolished we must figure out what he's getting at when he talks about the resolution of those differences.
  - His use of "no male or female" gives us a clue as to his meaning...the verbiage used here is the same as that used in the Creation accounts, showing us that Paul is once again (as he has in many other places) calling us to be a people of God's New Creation.
    - As we'll make plain later in this paper, Paul recognizes that the Creation was made "good" before it was corrupted and made to wait for restoration into a New Creation.
    - Paul is a theologian of New Creation, as it is always the affirmation and reaffirmation of the existing Creation with which he is concerned.
  - Being a people of the New Creation means that things now must align with how they were originally intended and as they ultimately will be again.
  
- Remember that the key issue of Galatians concerns circumcision which not only set Jews apart from Gentiles but men apart from women as people of special privilege.
  - In contrast, Paul speaks about baptism as a spiritual equalizer, in which no one claims either inferior or superior status.
  - Through baptism, Paul is ruling out any attempt to back up male privilege via either circumcision or ethnicity.
  - This is important for us because...
  
- One of the key concerns behind this "women in ministry" issue is that those who limit women effectively elevate men.
  - much like the Jews who claimed special privilege because of their ethnicity...
  - ...or the circumcised men who claimed special privilege because of their cultic sacrifice.
  - Those who claim that women must be subordinate to men claim special privileges for themselves in all matters of family, society, and church.
  
- As such, the issue of women in ministry is not just a theological issue, it is an issue of justice.
  - The way that 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 have been used have not only limited women (a theological error and a hurtful slight against women) but they have also used the Scriptures to solidify their own power (a

theological error and a root system for a wide labyrinth of sin).

Rather than discrediting 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, I think Galatians 3.28 is better employed as a reminder to men that our power is not secured by our sex and that we hold no special privileges.

It not a rebuttal of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, but it does have some bearing on the issue of figuring out who God approves of to lead our churches.

Galatians 3.28 is a rebuke of men who keep power for themselves.

Moving on...

Rather than respond to the limiting passages (1 Corinthians 14 & 1 Timothy 2) I would like to **first** look at the biblical passages that indicate both men and women are to be included in leadership roles within the church. I am confident that when we see the limiting passages in light of the whole text of the Bible they will fall into their appropriate place as specific instructions for particular situations rather than universal laws binding on every occasion.

If we choose to do it the other way, looking first at the limiting passages, it **would be** like trying to figure out what the Bible has to say about marriage by reading the passages on divorce.

This way, in contrast, will help us understand God's intention and frame the limiting passages appropriately as variations within God's plan.

To begin, let us look *in the beginning*...

## THE ARGUMENT FROM CREATION

In the beginning, God created humanity to be His regents in this world. We were designed to represent God to all of Creation – *to fill the earth and to subdue it, to have dominion.*

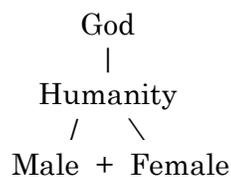
In context of our argument for the full inclusion of women into the highest levels of church leadership, Genesis 1 must bear pride of place as the starting point for an understanding of mutuality and equality: it is here that we see God's original design for humanity.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them. (emphasis mine)*

**GENESIS 1.26-27**

"Adam" is a generic Hebrew noun that means "human beings." We see that God creates [human beings] first before differentiating them into male and female. That is an important theological note, and one often overlooked, for it speaks to the fact that men and women – though different – are equal before God.



Let me reiterate:

*The woman and the man are both blessed by God equally.*

Later on, sin takes its course, demeaning and despising women, but God does not do this. The original intention of our good Creator was for men and women to rule the earth in mutuality. In fact, in the creation narrative there is not even a hint of status or role differentiation between male and female.

| The differentiation we experience in the world today exists because of sin. Adam and Eve rebelled against God and through their disobedience sin entered the world. God's response to this Original Sin was heartbreakingly bad news:

|        [After the Fall, God spoke to the woman and said]:  
I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;  
      with pain you will give birth to children.  
      Your desire will be for your husband,  
      and he will rule over you.

**GENESIS 3.16**

| The Fall distorted mutuality by turning women against men and men against women. Oneness became otherness and mutuality became rivalry for power.

| Sadly, some think that Genesis 3 is a prescription for a healthy relationship between a man and a woman, but this passage is predictive not prescriptive. Fallen women yearn to dominate men and fallen men yearn to dominate women. The desire to dominate is a broken desire – a distortion of God's original intent for men and women to together "fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1.28).

Dominion,

      once distorted,  
          becomes domination;

      just as mutuality,

          once distorted,  
          becomes mercenary.

| What is of vital importance to note, however, is that man's dominion over woman is part of the curse of sin after the Fall and does not represent God's original intention for male-female relationships. The curse betrays the fact that the submission of the woman to the man is not voluntary but forced. Since no one insists that all parts of the curse are binding in perpetuity, it is purely arbitrary to focus upon one part of the curse and elevate it to an eternally-established decree governing male-female relationships forever.

On the contrary, the Good News of the Scripture is that the Fall eventually gives way to New Creation; the fallen can be reborn and re-created. Sadly, the church has far too often perpetuated the Fall as a permanent condition. Perpetuating the Fall entails failing to restore

creation conditions when it comes to male-female relationships. Both Jesus and Paul consistently taught and lead in such a way as to move from creation (oneness) through sin (fragmentation) into New Creation (oneness once again).

God is One  
(*Deuteronomy 6.4*)

God creates One Humanity  
(*Genesis 1.26*)

One Humanity  
becomes Male and Female,  
who are One with God  
(*Genesis 1.27*)

Sin separates Humanity  
from itself  
and from God  
(*Genesis 3*)

Fragmentation defines Human existence  
(*Romans 3.23*)

Jesus, the One,  
(*John 10.30*)  
comes to restore Oneness with God  
and with Others  
and with Ourselves  
as True Humans once again  
(*John 17.20-23*)

Since Jesus is One,  
and God is One,  
we are One once again  
when we become One with Jesus  
(*Galatians 3.28*)

| Both Jesus and Paul see in Genesis 1 and 2 God's original intention for humanity. Christ's redemptive work brings this original intention back into play. Christian men and women are to live a life that moves beyond the Fall, beyond the battle of wills and domination. This is, undoubtedly, what Paul meant when he referred to the New Creation:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the New Creation has come:  
the old has gone, the new is here!

**2 CORINTHIANS 5.17**

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the  
world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means  
anything; what counts is a New Creation.

**GALATIANS 6.14-15**

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but  
fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's  
household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,  
with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the  
whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy  
temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together  
to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

**EPHESIANS 2.19-22**

Paul's point in these passages is that the implications of the Fall are  
undone for those who are in Christ. This draws us directly back to  
Genesis 3.16 to see that the otherness struggle between the sexes for  
control has been ended because we are now in the New Creation.

| We are being restored to the equality and mutuality of Genesis 1 and  
| 2. If New Creation does anything, it unleashes the power to  
| undermine the Fall.

This cannot be overemphasized:

| *The Story of the Bible is the Story of New Creation.*

| Life in Christ creates mutuality, unity, and Oneness. If there is any  
| place in the world where this mutuality should be restored, it is in the  
| church. Ironically, church is often the least redemptive place in the  
| world.

That needs to change.

Instead of limiting women from the highest positions in church office  
on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2, we should recognize  
that God's original intention was for men and women to live and lead  
together as supported by:

| Genesis 1-2,  
| John 10,

John 17,  
Galatians 3,  
2 Corinthians 5,  
Galatians 6,  
Ephesians 2,

and the promises of God to renew Creation in:

|                   Isaiah 65-66,

                  Ezekiel 40-48,

                  1 Corinthians 15,

                  Romans 8,

|                                   and Revelation 21-22.

## WHAT WOMEN ACTUALLY DID IN THE BIBLE

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

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

**ACTS 2.16-18**, citing Joel 2.28-30

The single most convincing argument that women should be included in all levels of church leadership is that they were included in all levels of church leadership in the Bible. Given the numerous occasions on which women lead, taught (and taught men), spoke publicly, evangelized, prophesied, and were listed among the elders and deacons and apostles of the New Testament church, it is impossible to believe that Paul's limiting passages (1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2) were meant to negate all that had already been put into place [\(in many cases by Paul himself\)](#).

Consider what women actually did in the Bible:

(note: because this article is being prepared for Westwinds, and because the point of contention here is not with the competence of women in leadership but with ascertaining the propriety of women in leadership, I will narrow the scope of my overview to the New Testament women who lead, leaving aside such remarkable First Testament women as Deborah, Huldah, and Esther).

Mary (not Joseph) is the first to receive the message of Christ's birth into the world. She is honored and blessed by angels. She is also the first to sing and prophesy about the Christ child (cf. Luke 1).

The prophetess Anna receives honorable mention as one who speaks of the Messiah to those who have waited for Him (Luke 2.36-38).

Mary (the mother of Jesus) obviously had a tremendous impact on the way in which her son fulfilled his messianic purpose. Consider that many of the themes present in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55) appear in much the same way in both Jesus'

teaching and James' (Jesus' half-brother) epistle (cf. Luke 4, James 1).

During Christ's earthly ministry, a group that Luke calls *the Women* were just as well known as *the Twelve* (Luke 8.1-3, 23.49 + 55, 22.24). In fact, the twelve male disciples were a rather pitiful bunch when compared to Christ's female disciples, who abandon Jesus in the Garden and are not rehabilitated until much later. Because of this, Tom Wright has light-heartedly referred to these women as "apostles to the apostles."

Mary (not Jesus' mother, but the sister of Martha) caused near-scandal by avoiding her "women's work" in the kitchen to sit at Jesus' feet. In that world, at that time, to sit at someone's feet meant that you were a student and they were the teacher. Receiving this kind of instruction was strictly the province of men. Furthermore, you wouldn't simply learn like this for your own personal edification, but in order to become a rabbi or teacher yourself. This, undoubtedly, is what really bothered Martha: her sister was neglecting her female role and adopting, instead, a male role as a student and apprentice.

The woman who anointed Jesus' feet (traditionally, Mary Magdalene) was performing a priestly action – she was preparing Jesus' body for burial – and Jesus recognized the sacramental nature of her offering (cf. Luke 7.36-50).

The Women were the last ones to leave the Cross (cf. Luke 24) at Christ's crucifixion and the first ones to visit the Tomb after his burial (cf. Luke 24). Further, Mary was the first person to whom Jesus appeared after the resurrection, and the first person charged with proclaiming the Gospel (not only was she charged with proclaiming the Gospel *prior* to the [male] Apostles, she was charged to proclaim the Gospel *to* the [male] Apostles cf. John 20.10-18)

Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, taught Apollos (a Greek scholar) the way of the Lord more fully (Acts 18.26). This is significant because, in order for them to have taught a scholar, Priscilla and Aquilla must have been well-versed (to say the least) in both Scripture and theology. Furthermore, four out of the six times this couple is mentioned in the Bible, Priscilla's name is listed first (Acts 18.18 and 26, Romans 16.3, 2 Timothy 4.19). This is ancient shorthand for signifying that Priscilla was more spiritually prominent. The fact that her name appears first when she and her husband instructed Apollos indicates that she led in that exchange (Acts 18.26 NASB and NIV).

Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21.9). This means they prophesied, which – in the first century – was always done in and among the church.

In 1 Corinthians 11.4-5, Paul says that women may both pray and prophesy when the church comes together (cf. 1 Corinthians 11.1-34). The context of this passage clearly shows that Paul is referring to public meetings where both men and women are present.

When Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he honored the following women for their services in the church: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, and the sister of Nereus (cf. Romans 16).

In Romans 16.2, Paul refers to Phoebe, a deacon (a lesser officer in the church, charged with visiting the sick, taking care of the poor, and fiscal management of the church's resources), a *prostatis*, which means “one who stands in front of, superintends, guards, and provides care for others.” Historically, we know that Phoebe was the courier for Paul's letter to the church in Rome, charged with the task of explicating it so the Romans could understand the complex theological reasoning. Clearly, Phoebe was a minister of the Gospel message and had some authority over not only individuals, but entire congregations as a teacher and expositor.

Paul commends Junia for being outstanding among the apostles (cf. Romans 16.7). This shows that Junia (a woman) was [1] an apostle, the highest officer in the early church; and [2] therefore obviously met (at least) the qualifications for the office of elder, which was a lesser office within the church. Along with her husband, Andronicus, Junia was recognized as having gifts from God – “gifts” meaning things like evangelizing, teaching, preaching, establishing leaders, and leading churches.

In Philippians 4.2-3, Paul makes special mention of Euodias and Syntyche who helped him in the Lord's work.

Paul reminds Titus that the older women should be “teachers of good things.” They should teach the younger women (Titus 2.3-5).

Paul commends Timothy's mother and grandmother. We can reasonably infer that these two women taught Timothy the Scriptures since he was a child (2 Timothy 1.5, 3.15).

Clearly, women were active in the ministry of the first-century church. Because they were recipients of the Holy Spirit, they were just as much a part of the believing priesthood as were the men. We find them prophesying publicly, praying publicly, teaching publicly, leading alongside Paul (as well as other men), and leading male Christians.

Given these facts, how can we reasonably assume that Paul meant for us to completely silence women in the higher levels of ecclesial leadership? Even if he did mean that women shouldn't become elders – which, again, I think we've established is not what he meant – Paul obviously felt comfortable appointing and employing women in the highest levels of leadership whenever he felt it was appropriate.

At best, Paul's injunctions are flexible. Much more likely, Paul's injunctions are merely situational.

He didn't mean to keep women out of the highest offices of leadership. He himself put women in those offices and commended them for their high performance.

## THE LIMITING PASSAGES

I would like to now deal with “the limiting passages” (as they are commonly known) of 1 Corinthians 14.33-35 and 1 Timothy 2.11-15.

In my mind, the usual reason we run into trouble interpreting these passages correctly is either because we

[1] stumble upon them in our devotional reading and are startled by Paul’s teaching, or

[2] through either recommendation or indoctrination or personal curiosity we try and see what all the fuss is about.

In both scenarios we commit a grievous error:

we interpret the whole of biblical teaching on women  
in light of these two texts (just 8 verses out of 7,959)  
instead of (properly) interpreting these two texts  
in light of the entire Story of God and the Bible.

Having looked first at God’s original design for humanity in Genesis 1,  
and then looked more deeply at how that original design is  
being restored within the church through Christ as New  
Creation –

complete with plenty of examples of women doing  
exactly the kinds of things Paul seems to prohibit –

I want to now scrutinize these two texts in light of the larger Story.

## THE LIMITING PASSAGES: 1 CORINTHIANS 14

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

### 1 CORINTHIANS 14.33b-35

Knowing what we do about *all that women actually did* within the New Testament, it seems surprising and strange for Paul to say women should “remain silent in the churches.” After all, Paul gives instruction about what women are supposed to wear while prophesying (cf. 1 Corinthians 11), so certainly he cannot mean for them to prophesy silently. Prophesying – at the very least – means saying something in public. How can Paul acknowledge women praying and prophesying in Chapter 11 without one word of prohibition or condemnation and then command them to keep silent in Chapter 12?

Thankfully, Paul himself clarifies what he means in verse 35: *if they want to inquire about something...* Paul’s “silencing,” then, specifically relates to asking questions.

Why would Paul restrict questions during church? I think the obvious answer is – in this case – the most accurate: *they had too many questions.*

Since women in the ancient world weren’t educated in the same ways as men, and since religious education was especially segregated, women simply didn’t know as much as their husbands. Paul, elsewhere, takes steps to redress this (as did Jesus), but since he’s speaking here about practical concerns during church services these instructions are simply that husbands and wives should take time after church to talk through all that has happened and all that was discussed.

Paul’s silencing of women here was only a (very) temporary silencing. Once the women with questions had been brought up to speed, then they would have been able to ask questions in the gatherings later on. He obviously has no interest in silencing women in Corinth, but only in making sure that those who pray or prophesy will do so in a manner that won’t detract or distract from Christ.

In other words,

Paul has no problem with their theology,

just with their behavior.

The problem is that women – so long denied any participation whatsoever in religious worship – were taking their newfound freedom in Christ too far. These (New Roman) women were warmly welcomed and encouraged to participate fully in the services (cf. 1 Corinthians 14.5), and they saw no reason to be shackled by the oppressive conventions of a non-Christian (Greek) culture. Therefore, when they came to church they took off their hats and veils, both of which were despised symbols of their inferior status.

For them, it was like casting off chains;  
for the church it was (unfortunately) the cultural equivalent of all the ladies showing up in bikinis for worship.

By flaunting their freedom from social decorum, these women had become an embarrassment in the church and a scandal outside it.

**ONE QUICK NOTE ON LANGUAGE:** There are many Greek words that can be translated “to speak.”

Five denote a special kind of speaking  
(like preaching or giving instruction).  
25 others simply mean things like “teach” or “talk.”

Paul uses none of these.

In other words, Paul does not here forbid women to speak publicly or teach or prophesy or pray or give testimony.

Instead, Paul uses a Greek word which means “chatter” (*laleo*).

Paul is merely prohibiting noisy, idle conversations during worship services, which – in this case – was mostly being done by a group of uneducated women who were impatient to figure out what was happening during church.

When Paul tells them to be “in submission as the Law says” he is referring to a voluntary submission (indicated by use of the verb *hypoitassomai*) to the law of social convention and common courtesy (not, as it must first appear, to the Law of Moses which has no such injunction in it).

Finally, it’s worth mentioning that there is a convenient oversight that often occurs among those who take this passage at face value and limit the role of women within the church.

Even in strict, fundamentalist churches, women still play a public role. They are still allowed to teach Sunday school, evening classes, run prayer meetings and Bible studies, conduct marital counseling, and organize special events.

In other words, even in the strictest sense it seems impossible to follow Paul's teaching in the literal sense.

There are now two obvious problems with the argument for taking this passage literally:

[1] no one does, not all the way;

[2] no one could, not all the way.

Since it's impossible to take this passage literally, we must determine to what degree the text supports the situational issue Paul is addressing. That's what we've done here.

To summarize:

There are many curious women in the congregation who are eager to learn (for the first time)

and won't stop asking their husbands questions,  
or calling out their questions to the teacher,  
or chattering with their friends  
about what is going on.

All of that is quite disruptive.

Paul wants them to be quiet during church, and then ask for clarification from their husbands later (assuming, as would be safe in that society, that the husbands had had access to better education for a longer period of time and were thus more likely to know what had been taught).

## THE LIMITING PASSAGES: 1 TIMOTHY 2

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

### 1 TIMOTHY 2.11-15

One of the things so bafflingly ignored in this passage is the opening clause: *a woman should learn*. Paul's focus in this passage is not on what women cannot do, but what they can do. He is not concerned with silence in general, but with silence in order to facilitate learning.

| The verse next literally reads: *I do not permit a woman dominance of a man*. Although commonly translated as a permanent injunction, it does not read that way in Greek. In the original languages, the text is written in the present active indicative case: *I am not presently permitting a woman to teach*.

Paul expects women to learn in quietness and full submission to those who know, and only then does he say that they are not to teach or exercise authority. Learning women are to be quiet. Paul never says that women are always to be learners and never to be teachers, nor does he say that they are forever to remain silent, for that would clearly contradict many of the practices Paul sanctioned and authored personally.

What Paul is talking about here is a temporary silence – a silence that facilitates learning – so that those who do not yet understand will not yet presume to teach. Remember, Paul is writing in a social and historical setting in which many women were straining under the bonds of the dominant male hegemony. Consequently, cults that encouraged sexually provocative and extravagant dress, bold and often impassioned teaching, and outright hatred (and ritual castration) of men were growing like wildfire in the Empire. Caesar Augustus was even forced to pass laws to limit the freedoms of these New Roman Women (as they are now called by historians), which only further fueled the flames of their oppression and reaction.

Many of these New Roman Women had apparently found their way into Paul's churches in Ephesus and Corinth, and Paul was forced to sift their newfound freedoms from their base hatred and excess (hence the sections of 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians that deal explicitly with how women should dress, etc.).

The main thrust of Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy is that learning should precede teaching. The women in these churches did not yet know enough to teach, and so Paul instructed them to learn. Women who had always been gifted by God to speak for God and to lead God's people were doing those things in Paul's churches. But women who had not yet learned biblical theology or who had not yet learned how to live a Christian life were not to become teachers until they had learned orthodox theology. Paul was cautioning women from assuming roles for which they were neither trained nor equipped at the time. Once they had been fully instructed, they would then be qualified and competent to exercise the authority of one who teaches sound doctrine.

In short, Paul is saying that women must have the space and leisure to study and learn in their own way, not in order that they may muscle in and take over the leadership as in the Artemis cult, but so that men and women alike can develop whatever gifts of learning, teaching, and leadership God has given them.

On to the second issue in this passage...

For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

**1 TIMOTHY 2.13-15**

In every other instance of Paul's writing he speaks about the Fall as being Adam's fault (cf. Romans 5.12, for example). Curiously, he does not do so here. The reason he does this is because some of the New Roman Women were clearly pushing that – since sin entered through Adam – women were free from Sin because of their gender and should wrest authority away from men within the church because they were naturally better suited to lead.

Paul knows this is nonsense, and quickly dispels that false teaching by reminding his audience that Eve sinned also.

Some have used this passage to craft the Hierarchical Argument – an argument that states God has designed a hierarchy of authority and responsibility in which women find themselves subordinate to men on the basis of gender. I will deal with this argument in some depth later on in this paper; for now, remember that Paul's basic point is to insist that women, too, must be allowed to learn and study as Christians, and not be kept in unlettered, uneducated boredom and drudgery. The story of Adam and Eve makes the point well: look what happened

when Eve was deceived. Women need to learn just as much as men do.

## COMMON OBJECTIONS

In this final section of the paper I want to deal briefly with two common objections to our (new) stance on women in ministry. The first objection is commonly called “The Hierarchical Argument,” which may seem at first to be a good one. Many reputable people still hold to this view and there is initially some good biblical support for it.

The second issue is, honestly, a straw man argument. I would not include this second argument (or a response to it) except that it raises its ugly and poorly thought-through head in conversations both academic and pastoral. The basic objection is that we are twisting Scripture, though it is usually presented much more emotionally than cognitively.

I will deal with each objection in turn: the former respectfully, the latter graciously.

## THE HIERARCHICAL ARGUMENT

One of the common arguments against the full inclusion of women at the highest levels of church leadership concerns the order of creation, or “hierarchical argument” as it’s sometimes called. In this piece, I present and dissect the argument, hopefully moving our Church ball down the theological field a little further.

There are three main scriptures in which the hierarchical argument is rooted. I’ll cite each, explain briefly the corresponding arguments, and then undo some of the confusion.

The LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, *this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man.* For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

**GENESIS 2.21-24**

Now, the hierarchical argument against women in the highest positions of church leadership relies upon this scripture. In this view, men are elevated above women because the man was created first, and the woman second. Furthermore, God created Adam from the earth but Eve was created by removing a piece from Adam, thereby making Eve only a portion/derivative of God’s first person. Most scholars are careful to notice that Eve’s derivation doesn’t mean she’s worth less than Adam, just that her position in God’s hierarchy is subordinate to that of her husband.

There are some problems with this argument. First, I’m not sure the “order of creation” means everything we think it does about hierarchy, value, or authority. Just because Adam was made first doesn’t mean that Adam has more authority than Eve...at least, the scripture certainly doesn’t indicate that here. Furthermore, if earlier creation was proof of greater authority that would mean that all people are subordinate to every tree, plant, animal, star, and even the earth itself...something that Genesis 1.28 (“*fill the earth and subdue it*”) seems to directly contradict.

Additionally, we should probably note the substance that man and woman are made from are irrelevant to their value and position. Man is made from dirt (2.7), but woman from man (2.21-22), yet both are

called “one flesh” (2.24). This “one flesh” means there can be no “first flesh” or “lesser flesh”...they’re one...they’re the same.

Finally, it’s important to notice that when God makes Adam a helpmeet the Hebrew word (*ezer*) means something very different than it might at first appear. We typically think of a helpmeet as a June Cleaver-type personality (apron on, in the kitchen, with muffins fresh from the oven), but that word (*ezer*) most commonly refers to God Himself...which certainly means that the helper is AT LEAST AS POWERFUL as the person receiving the help. Translators were careful to make this plain when the Bible was first put into Greek (in the LXX, Septuagint, version of Scripture), making sure to translate this passage as a “helper suitable unto himself” rather than just as a helpmeet.

For man did not come from woman, but woman from man...In the Lord, however, 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, and everything comes from God.  
**1 CORINTHIANS 11.8, 11-12**

Here Paul apparently goes along with the hierarchical argument (in fact, for most scholars, Paul is the first biblical writer to actually make it), saying in verse 3 that *the head of every woman is the man*.

| However, we must notice the inclusion of verses 11 and 12 in this same passage which seem to reverse this argument almost completely: *for as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman and everything comes from God*. In other words, Paul is saying that Adam may have preceded Eve but – ever since – every woman has necessarily preceded ed each man. Furthermore, Paul points out that this chicken-before-egg argument completely misses the point of authority because all authority ultimately comes from God anyway.

This is probably a good time to point out that – even though God often seems to pay special attention to things like hierarchy and birth order in the Old Testament – God frequently bypasses these hierarchical patterns. God used Jacob instead of Esau, for example, even though Jacob was the second-born. Moses, too, was preferred over Aaron (his older brother). David, youngest son of Jesse, was elevated above his father, his family, his country, and even his existing King to serve as God’s chosen representative for Israel. This pattern calls to mind

| Jesus’ words in Mark 9.35: *If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all*.

To the woman God said, *I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your*

*desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.*  
(emphasis mine)  
**GENESIS 3.16**

This passage of Scripture describes the curse God lays upon Eve for her disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Of key importance is that her *desire will be for her husband and he will rule over (her)*.

However, this ruling-over should certainly be read as part of the curse resulting from sin, not from God's original intention for His creation. Furthermore, this ruling-relationship is not something that the woman will desire – she will desire her husband, but in exchange will only receive his rule – it is something that the man will aggressively take from his wife. Still further, we should be very careful about attributing God's blessing to the man's actions as part of this curse.

Again, God is speaking *prophetically*, not *prescriptively*, here: the man will rule-over, but not because God wants him too. God's desire for mutuality has already been made clear in the earlier parts of Genesis. This ruling-over is a distortion of God's creation, not an addendum to it. God has no desire for the man to rule-over – at least, the text certainly doesn't say God wants that to happen, only that it will as a result of the sin committed.

As to whether or not this consequence should (or even does) endure, we might wonder about the role of Jesus' atoning death. Jesus came to restore God's original creation.

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.  
**ROMANS 8.20-21**

Jesus came to undo the effects of Sin and the Curse upon the world. He came to reverse the work of the Fall and we have been buried with him through baptism and raised now into the life designed for us by God (Romans 6.4). The Curse, then, is not binding for lovers and followers of Jesus – he has freed us from that Curse forever.

More can be said both in favor and dissent concerning the hierarchical argument. This brief summary covers the main points, with more to follow if further discussion based upon the biblical text is required.

Please thoughtfully and respectfully continue to review the issue. It is of some importance to our church.

## YOU'RE TWISTING THESE PASSAGES

A couple of years ago I heard a famous pastor make a sarcastic remark about the issue of women in leadership. This pastor is a fundamentalist conservative who denies women the office of elder within his church and seems to enjoy the controversy that surrounds this (and many other) decisions.

In response to someone defending the full inclusion of women at the highest levels of church leadership, he said: “The Bible clearly states women cannot lead; yet, somehow you’ve found a magical fancy way to try and make it say anything but that.”

That’s a common (albeit thoughtless) criticism and I’d like to respond to it here precisely because it is [1] so common and [2] so thoughtless.

This critique holds no water for three reasons:

1. The texts of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 do not, in actual fact, plainly state that women cannot be elders, pastors, apostles, and so on, particularly when we read the letters of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy in their entirety (though the surrounding sections will usually suffice). Rather than just these 3 or 4 verses, we find that Paul is saying some revolutionary things, among them:
  - women should learn.
  - women should be permitted to be involved in public ministry.
  - women should be permitted to lead gatherings and congregations.

However, there are some stipulations: women must be modest and must conduct themselves in orderly ways. Additionally, women are warned not to try and exert dominance over men (as was the case in the Artemis cult) nor should they be permitted to chit chat all the way through church services to their friends or interrupt the service with pestering questions.

2. Our “fancy talk” is not clever rhetoric designed to escape the clear meaning of Scripture. Any fanciness is what scholars refer to as hermeneutical exegesis – it is the way we correctly interpret Scripture according to the basic rules of authorship, intent, content, recipients, structure, and (most importantly) context.

If I'm correct, the real accusation behind "fancy talk" is not our willingness to talk deeply about Scripture but a suspicion that we are trying to get around the unpopular bits of Scripture in order to appeal somehow to our contemporary audience. In this argument, I think our opponents believe we are catering to the popular vote and afraid to fully stand behind the teaching of our Bible.

Yet nothing could be further from the truth. There are counter-cultural (and woefully unpopular) teachings within the Scriptures – like abstinence, loving your enemies, and moderation in all things (just to name a few). We at Westwinds have no problem preaching counter-to-the-culture when the biblical text requires we do so; however, in this case no such requirement has been made.

3. Our engagement with the males-are-in-charge interpretation of this text is (again) not due to our cowardice in the face of cultural opposition, but it is grounded in a deep-seated belief that Paul's letters should be properly understood through careful study, scrutiny, and cross-reference. We are not trying to get it to say anything other than what it says...we are simply trying to figure out what Paul meant his original audience to hear, and what his original audience understood Paul to mean in their setting.

In sum, I think it safe to say that any supposed prohibitions against women in leadership and ministry are easily overcome by proper biblical exegesis and the overwhelming precedent of biblical and historical examples.

## CLOSING REMARKS

For many of you reading this, this paper may represent a new and frustratingly complex foray into the realm of theological debate. I empathize with your sense of dislocation – theology, I promise, is usually way more fun.

This, however, is an important issue and we wanted to deal with it, if not comprehensively, then at least fully.

We acknowledge that this position – that women can serve in the highest church offices (namely that of elder and/or teaching pastor) – as with any position taken on two-sided issues, has the potential to create hurt and misunderstanding. Our hope is that we can all do ministry for the kingdom and do it hand in hand, knowing that we will disagree at times on gray areas of doctrine. This has nothing to do with our salvation or position in Christ as we rally around his life, death, burial, and resurrection. Our proclamation of those facts must, and will, remain primary and central.

## RESOURCE LIST

I am deeply indebted to the research and writings of several other writers. The work in this paper is not purely my own – not by a long shot – and it is appropriate for several of these authors and their works to be duly noted.

*A Woman's Place*, by C.S. Cowles

*The Blue Parakeet*, by Scot McKnight

*Women in Ministry: Exercising the Leadership Gift*, by John Ortberg

*Paul for Everyone: the Prison Letters*, by Tom Wright

*Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*, by Tom Wright

*Women's Service in the Church*, by Tom Wright

*Women in Ministry*, by Frank Viola