

**FAITH  
COMMUNITY  
CHURCH**

# ABOUT WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

This position paper seeks to outline Faith Community Church's (FCC) position on the doctrine and practice of women in leadership positions in the church.

## Introduction: What is the Issue?

There are some instructions that the Apostle Paul provides that, taken at face value, make it seem as though women should be silent, restricted from teaching in the church, and limited in their leadership function in the church.

The correct interpretation of these texts is unclear, which has resulted in a wide spectrum of applications of these texts in a local church context. The most extreme views are what are classified as complementarian and egalitarian. A brief comparison of the core elements of each view is summarised in the table below.

<b>COMPLEMENTARIAN</b>	<b>EGALITARIAN</b>
Gender is ordained by God	Gender is ordained by God
Men and women have equal value	Men and women have equal value
Abusive male dominance is a sin	Abusive male dominance is a sin
Men are called to be servant-leaders	Men and women have equal authority
Men and women have distinct roles	Men and women have interchangeable roles
We thrive with distinct roles	We thrive with interchangeable roles

This paper seeks to explore the key Biblical passages related to this issue to the extent that a clear rationale for FCC's position is provided. What this paper will not provide is a complete discussion that addresses this subject in its entirety, covering all bases.

## Genesis 1-3

The creation account will be the theological backbone for much of what Scripture says about gender roles in the family and the church. The creation account displays both the ontological equivalence and functional distinction between male and female.

The following demonstrates the ontological equality (equal in value as beings) of males and females:

- a. Man and woman are both created in the image of God (Gen 1:27).

The following demonstrates the distinct functional responsibility of Adam and Eve (i.e. male and female):

- a. Adam was given unique responsibilities e.g. naming of animals (Gen 2:19-20), directly given the commands of God (Gen 2:16-17)

- b. Eve was created out of Adam, rather than from the ground like Adam (Gen 2:22)
- c. Eve was deceived by the serpent (but Adam was silent) (Gen 3:6)

## **Galatians 3:28**

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The interpretation of this verse that supports an egalitarian perspective is that this verse is saying that Christ has removed and dissolved the gender, racial and class distinctions that separate us. Therefore, distinct gender roles should no longer exist in the church (and/or family).

The opposing interpretation, which is FCC's view, is that this verse does not mean that gender, race and class distinctions no longer exist.

Otherwise, why would Paul still refer to men and women; why would Paul address Philemon as the master and Onesimus as the slave? It is not that in Christ we cease to be Asian, Australian, rich, poor, male, female.

Rather, this verse affirms the ontological equality of all people in Christ. In other words, we all have equal status and value in Christ.

## **Ephesians 5:22-28**

*<sup>22</sup> Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup> For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup> Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

*<sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup> In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

This passage affirms the functional distinction between husband and wife within the family unit. The husband-wife relationship reflects the Christ-Church relationship. Husbands are to relate to their wives like Christ to the church - practicing self-sacrificial love and using their headship to lead their wives towards holiness and purity. Meanwhile, wives are to relate to their husbands like the church relates to Christ - *submission in everything*.

The word *submission* is *hypotassetai* from the root *hypotasso* which means "to submit to the orders of someone" or "to be subject to someone".

It should first be acknowledged that the practical application of a husband's self-sacrificial love and a wife's submission may look different across the cultural and historical spectrum. Having said that, we cannot avoid the fact that not only does this passage affirm the functional distinction of husband and wife, but it explicitly states that wives are to submit to the authority of their husbands. There is little wiggle room for redefining or diluting the weight of the word - submission - when it is likened to the submission of the church to Christ.

It should also be noted that the discomfort felt by the modern, Western world is not a universal discomfort shared across time, culture and geographic location. It is a product of our time and culture. In the modern, Western world we are more sensitive and aware of domestic abuse, the oppression of women, and the competence of women to lead in many spheres of society. However, such sentiments were probably not shared by the first century church to which the Pauline epistles were primarily addressed.

Therefore, we must work hard to discern what instructions are culturally bound and what are transcultural i.e. directly applicable across time and culture.

In the case of Ephesians 5:22-28, the relationship between husband and wife are considered transcultural because they are directly and integrally tied to the relationship between Christ and the Church, which is transcultural by nature. There also does not seem to be any discernible cultural reason for his instructions, which leads us to conclude that the functionally distinct relationship within the family unit is transcultural.

## Miscellaneous Texts

Before focusing on specific texts that contain specific instructions on women ministering and leading in the church we should briefly survey some texts that relate to the subject in some minor or slightly tangential way, but that nevertheless deserve mention.

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**Col 3:16** - *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

- The word for “teaching” is a derivative of the word didasko, which refers to general instruction.
- This passage affirms that some degree of teaching is applicable and expected from all members of the church regardless of role, office, or gifting.
- It is slightly unclear whether the kind of teaching encouraged in this passage is connected to singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.  
For example, NIV makes this connection explicit - “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all *wisdom through psalms*, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”  
But, ESV does not make this connection - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all *wisdom, singing psalms* and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”  
Despite the uncertainty in the precise translation, what remains clear is that all believers are involved in some degree of teaching to one another in some form.

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**Acts 18:24-26** - <sup>24</sup>Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup>He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup>He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

- What is notable in this passage is that both Priscilla (wife) and Aquila (husband) taught Apollos (a man) a better understanding of the gospel.

- The fact that Priscilla is mentioned first, before her husband, may imply that she had a more prominent role in teaching Apollos, however this is not clear and definitive.
  - The primary detail that should be noted here is that a woman was involved in the teaching of a man. Therefore, there is Biblical support that women can teach men. However, in this instance it was done together with her husband and in a private setting i.e. not in a public worship context.
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**Titus 2:3-4** - Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to **teach** what is good, <sup>4</sup> and so train the young women to love their husbands and children

- The word translated as “teach” in this passage is *kalodidaskalos*, which means “one who teaches what is good and morally right.” This is not the same as *didasko*, which refers to general instruction and is found in Colossians 3:16.
- Therefore, the kind of teaching and training that Paul is encouraging the older women to participate in is to disciple and guide the younger women in how to live righteously in a culturally appropriate manner.
- On the subject of women in ministry, this passage can be used in 2 ways:
  - I. It could be taken to support the exclusion of women from public teaching since the older women were specifically instructed to teach the younger women and not men.
  - II. It could be taken to not necessarily contribute to the issue of women engaging in public teaching since Paul is referring to a different kind of teaching altogether. He seems to be referring specifically to moral instruction (*kalodidaskolos*) rather than general Biblical instruction (*didasko*). As such, this passage does not necessarily speak to the exclusion of women from public teaching.

The other significant instance where the subject of women and teaching is raised is in 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In this instance the word for teaching is a derivative of *didasko*. Given that the word for teaching in Titus 2, refers uniquely and specifically to moral teaching, it seems more likely that option II is more likely.

## 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

<sup>2</sup> I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the traditions just as I passed them on to you. <sup>3</sup> But 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. <sup>4</sup> Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head. <sup>5</sup> But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. <sup>6</sup> For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.

<sup>7</sup> A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. <sup>8</sup> For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; <sup>9</sup> neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup> It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. <sup>12</sup> For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. <sup>13</sup> Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? <sup>14</sup> Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, <sup>15</sup> but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. <sup>16</sup> If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.

This is a strange passage for most living in Western, developed societies because of the extreme cultural differences between our society and the original audience of the Biblical text.

There are a few key interpretative issues to highlight that can help us understand the meaning of the text and how it applies to our present-day context.

### **A. Order of Authority**

At the outset, we are faced with a challenging interpretative issue – how do we translate “man” and “woman.”

In Greek, the original language of this passage, the words for “woman” and “man” can also be translated to “wife” and “husband,” respectively.

Such textual ambiguity is one of the reasons why this passage, and other passages on this subject, are notoriously challenging to interpret.

One’s choice of translation of these two words has significant implications on the interpretation and application of the text. Namely, it significantly affects how we understand the *order of authority* that Paul is outlining.

The *order of authority* is the foundational principle upon which the rest of his instructions about appropriate attire is built.

Let’s see how it changes depending on one’s translation of “man” and “woman.”

#### **Option 1: Man & Woman**

If we decide that the better understanding of the text is that Paul is addressing the genders of male and female, then the order of authority that he instructs should be adhered to within the church context is:

God -> Christ -> Man -> Woman

From this perspective, all men have authority over all women. Conversely, it means that all women must submit to all men in the church.

The argument for this interpretation is that if we refer to the creation account, Adam is the representative (federal) head over both the human race and all men, similarly Eve is the representative head over all women. Therefore, since Adam was the head of Eve and by consequence, Eve was in submission to Adam, all women must submit to all men.

#### **Option 2: Husband & Wife**

The second option is to translate “man” to “husband” and “woman” to “wife.” In this case the order of authority is:

God -> Christ -> Husband -> Wife

If “man” is translated as “husband”, and “woman” is translated as “wife”, then Paul is not saying that men (in general) have authority over women (in general), rather he is affirming the order of authority in the family unit, which is affirmed by Ephesians 5. Therefore, the order of authority and his instructions in this text concern the order within the family unit and how that can affect the church.

### **B. Specific instructions on head coverings**

Instructions on head coverings seem culturally rooted and culture-bound because such matters were significant at the time but no longer carry the same weight in Western society.

Heading coverings for women may have been culturally significant in the following ways:

- Head coverings may have been worn by women in religious worship settings and therefore connoted respect and honour
- No head coverings on married women in public may have connoted looseness or a mark of a prostitute
- It may be inferred from 11:16 that women wearing head coverings was common practice among churches

Paul's reference to hair length is not an instruction but another piece of his argument for head coverings (1 Cor. 11:14-15). Paul is arguing on the basis of the "very nature of things." If verses 7-12 were his argument on the basis of special revelation (scripture) then verses 14-15 are his argument on the basis of natural revelation. A rephrasing of Paul's argument is that a woman's long hair is nature's head covering. What is typical in the natural is indicative of a spiritual reality that he asserts should be expressed in the form of head coverings for women.

### **C. Note on 11:7-10**

11:7-10 communicates a very important point. Firstly, we must notice that Paul does not say that women are not made in the image of God, rather his point is that how men/husbands behave honours or dishonours God i.e. brings glory or shame to God. Likewise, how women behave honours or dishonours their husband.

We must remember this is in an honour-shame culture, where one's social status is significant. Therefore, Paul's point is that women should behave and dress in such a way that honours their husband.

### **Additional note**

It's a minor but very important detail that Paul does not prohibit women from praying and prophesying in public (11:5), if anything, it seems like this was common practice.

### **Conclusion**

The principle at the heart of Paul's instruction for women to wear head coverings is that the order of the authority within the family unit must be honoured both inside and outside the church. His primary concern is how to honour and uphold the order of authority that God has established in the family unit at creation in a culturally appropriate manner. All his instructions serve to fulfill this purpose.

## **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**

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

To understand Paul's instructions in context we must understand both the cultural and literary context of the passage.

### **Cultural Context**

There are a few cultural distinctives that play key influences in our interpretation of the text:

**A. Women were uneducated:** most women were not afforded the opportunity to engage in formal education regardless of their ability.

**B. Honour-shame culture:** “Simply defined, honour and shame refer to the ongoing attribution or loss of esteem by one’s peers, family, social-class, city, and so on.”<sup>1</sup> In such a culture, which Paul and his hearers were immersed in, one’s social status was of extreme significance. Therefore, how one behaved in public and even who one associated with could positively or negatively impact one’s prospects.

When approaching the genre of letter/epistle, which 1 Corinthians belongs to, to accurately interpret and apply the instructions within the letter, it helps if we can recreate the conditions that the letter was addressing.

To this end, we note the following:

- In a public worship setting women and men were likely seated separately, with men being seated in one area and women in another.
- What may have been happening was that some women were interrupting and disrupting the sermon/teaching with questions. Some suggest that wives were specifically interrogating their husbands in the public worship setting and thereby dishonouring them publicly, which is why Paul was so strict and severe in his instructions for women to be silent. While this is a possibility, it need not be the case to make sense of Paul’s instructions.
- Whatever was happening, the behaviour of some women was bringing disgrace (or dishonour) to their husbands, which was particularly harmful in an honour-shame culture.

### Literary Context

This passage is part of a larger teaching that addresses the subject of order in a public worship setting. It seems plausible, if not logically reasonable, to see the undercurrent of this theme flowing through this passage as well. Therefore, given Paul’s underlying impetus for his instructions is order and peace, his instructions for women to be silent was to maintain order and peace in the public worship setting. Given the very specific circumstances and context that this passage is nestled in, it seems to be a hermeneutic stretch to take Paul’s instructions as an outright prohibition from speaking in general.

### Putting it all together

1. While it is natural to focus on Paul’s instructions for women specifically to be silent, we must be aware of the literary context and the wider instructions that this specific instruction to women finds itself. Namely, Paul calls for *all* those who wish to prophesy to exercise self-control and to be appropriately silent (14:28-33). His instructions to women to be silent, which immediately follow, are a means to achieve his primary end which is to maintain order in the public worship setting. Therefore, his instructions should not be understood in isolation of the social context of the Corinthian church. His specific instructions to women are culturally-bound to address a specific situation in the Corinthian church and we must be cautious in apply such instructions directly to contemporary contexts.

2. The word “submission” (14:35) is the same word used in Eph 5:24 to express the wife-husband relationship. This may be telling of the narrower range of application that Paul’s

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 13.

instructions carry since in Ephesians 5, Paul's instructions for women to submit to men are specifically in the context of a marriage. Therefore, it may be that his instructions in 1 Corinthians 14 are primarily addressed to wives, and not all women in general, to address how their behaviour in a public worship setting affects their husbands (and family). The principle of his specific instructions is to submit to their husbands both inside and outside the church in an honourable and culturally acceptable manner.

3. It seems that Paul's instructions for women to be silent was in direct response to a very specific contextual issue of some women disrupting the teaching time with questions and thereby disgracing their husbands in the church. Given that Paul does not outright prohibit women from participating in and engaging in the public worship service (1 Cor. 11:5) and that the overall theme of 1 Cor 14 is on the subject of "order," it seems that these commands were likely contextually specific.

## 1 Timothy 2:11-15

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

### Literary Context

The larger thematic literary unit possibly encompasses verses 8-10 as well. Considering 2:8-15, Paul is addressing the attitude men and women should have when engaging in public worship.

From verse 8, Paul moves to address the demeanour we need to have when we come to worship God. He begins by addressing the men with this instruction, "*Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.*" (v. 8). Notice that it is not just about the external posture of lifting hands; it is lifting "*holy hands*". Holy hands speak of right actions, but it must also be "*without anger and disputing*". This speaks of the attitudes of the heart that we come with. It is about coming with clean hands and pure hearts.

This is what God is looking for when we come to worship. The focus of the Apostle Paul was not about who should pray but the way that we should pray.

What about the women? Paul moves on to address the women. Paul uses the phrase "*in like manner*" or "*likewise*". This tells us that women were also participating in public worship. But Paul did not address the way they prayed but about the way they dressed.

On the outside, they are to avoid exorbitance and exhibitionism. On the inside, they are to have a peaceable and submissive attitude.

Like the men, the focus was not so much on the actions on the outside but the attitude on the inside. When we dress inappropriately, it is all about attracting attention to ourselves – either dressing up too much to be fleshy physically or dressing down so much just to prove that we are more spiritual than others. Both become self-worship instead of the worship of God. Our demeanour on the outside reflects the attitudes on the inside.

The following table is a summary of Paul's instructions:

	<b>External Holiness</b>	<b>Internal Holiness</b>
<b>Men</b>	Holy hands i.e. purity in conduct	Without anger, without controversy/arguing
<b>Women</b>	Modesty in attire	Peaceable/quiet and submissive

### **Word Study - Silence/Quiet**

Paul's instructions to the women stem from the internal attitude of holiness that is encouraged which is to be peaceable/quiet and submissive. The word for "submission" carries a similar weight and meaning as other occurrences in other letters (addressed earlier) and therefore should require no further discussion. However, the instruction to be quiet, silent, or peaceable (depending on translation) deserves further thought.

The word translated as "quietness" is the Greek word, *hesychia*, which means "calm, undisturbed quietness."

The following is an exploration of the scriptural occurrences that shed light on its meaning:

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**Acts 21:40-22:2** - *And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great **hush**, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you." And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more **quiet**.*

Two words are used to describe quietness:

- (i) Hush - Gk. *Sige* - absence of noise
- (ii) Quiet - Gk. *Hesychia* - calm, undisturbed quietness

*Sige* indisputably means the absence of noise. However, *hesychia* could refer to the literal absence of noise or to a more abstract state of calmness/peace.

Therefore, this passage might be describing two stages of quietness descending on the crowd – the first is the cessation of talking, while the second is a calmness of heart. Alternatively, it may refer to two stages of literal quietness that descended on the crowd, but this doesn't make much sense, since how does one become quieter beyond making no noise? Therefore, the former interpretation is preferred.

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**2 Thess 3:12** - *Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work **quietly** and to earn their own living.*

I do not think Paul is instructing Christians to literally do their work in silence, rather he is talking about a posture of heart. A helpful translation may be that Paul is instructing the Thessalonian Christians to work **peaceably** i.e. in such a way that doesn't cause a scene or stir up unnecessary controversy.

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**1 Tim 2:2** - *for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and **quiet** life, godly and dignified in every way.*

In this instance, "quiet" is the Greek word, *hesychios*, which is the adjectival derivative of *hesychia*, which means "tranquil, peaceful existence or attitude."

Clearly, Paul is not referring to the absence of noise here but to the posture and state of being.

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**1 Tim 2:11-12** - *<sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in **quietness** and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be **quiet**.*

We now return to the primary passage in question. As we have seen, in many occurrences of this word, it is used to refer to a state of being or a posture of heart. Therefore, Paul is not necessarily instructing women not to speak at all, rather he is addressing their attitude and posture of heart. Their posture and attitude in a public worship context should be peaceable and calm i.e. don't cause a scene. Women are not to have an attitude of argumentative aggressiveness, or stubborn insistence on having their own way or their own view recognized. Rather, their attitude is to be one of reasonableness, patience, and a willingness to listen to and learn from others.

### **Translation issue: Woman or wife?**

The word for "woman" (Gk. *gyne*) and "man" (Gk. *andros*; root - *aner*) can also be translated as "wife" and "husband," respectively.

As we have seen from other passages, this ambiguity makes these passages challenging to land on a definitive interpretation, especially since one's choice of translation significantly affects the meaning of the passage.

#### **Option #1: Woman**

If *gyne* is translated as "woman" then Paul's prohibitions can be interpreted as a general prohibition against women teaching or having authority over men.

The passage would read as such:

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

Adam and Eve are used as representatives of all men and all women, respectively. Eve's failure to resist the temptation of the serpent is an example of the propensity of all women to deception and therefore his argument is that they should not be teachers in the church.

In this case, Paul is affirming male headship in church polity.

#### **Option #2: Wife**

If *gyne* is translated as "wife" then Paul's prohibitions are against all women in general, but are specifically addressing the relationship between husband and wife.

The passage would read as such:

*<sup>11</sup> A wife should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a wife to teach or to assume authority over a (her) husband; she must be quiet.*

In this case, Adam and Eve are representatives of the husband-wife relationship.

Therefore, the principle underlying Paul's instructions are similar to those in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 – the created order in the family unit must be honoured inside and outside the church. As such, a wife must not behave in such a way that would disgrace her husband.

The application of this differs depending on context, which is the reason for Paul's wide range of prohibitions against women.

Eve's failure reinforces the reason for the created order in the family unit and the husband's unique place as authoritative head.

In this case, Paul is affirming male headship primarily in the family unit, which must also be honoured in the church.

Both options have strong arguments and it is challenging to evaluate which is more correct.

### **Eldership: Teaching and Authority**

It is clear that scripture does not prohibit women from teaching men or teaching in a general sense.

There is at least one instance (Aquila & Priscilla) where a woman has been involved in teaching a man (Acts 18:24-26); and Paul encourages all believers in the church to teach and admonish one another with the Word of God (Col. 3:16).

The pressing issue is whether there is a form of teaching that carries a unique authoritative substance.

We see some evidence of this when Paul outlines the qualifications of an elder in 1 Tim 3:1-7.

*Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. <sup>5</sup> (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.*

There are two details to note here:

1. Paul assumes and speaks as though males will exclusively hold the position of elder in the church
2. The elder alone requires the unique qualification of being able to teach

We see in the early history of the church that there was usually one elder (or bishop) that led a church and this elder would be responsible for the teaching, leading and shepherding of the local congregation. The functional equivalent in our contemporary context would be the Senior Pastor. This role, throughout the early church, was always if not exclusively held by males.

Now, there is a case to be made that Paul does not necessarily exclude females from the role of elder. It could be argued that, from a cultural perspective, that women generally did not have access to the education required to fulfill the role of elder. Furthermore, it may have been culturally unusual for women to hold such positions of authority in a religious setting. For instance, in the famous cult of Artemis/Diana (they are the same thing) women generally did not hold positions of authority despite the cult being dedicated to the worship of the goddess Artemis/Diana, who was the god of fertility and childbirth

(among other things such as hunting and the moon). Therefore, a case could be made that due to the cultural landscape, Paul did not and would not consider women being elders as an option.

While this argument is plausible it is nevertheless an argument from silence, which by itself, is not sufficiently convincing. In other words, while Paul may be silent on whether women can be elders, he is explicit and clear that men can be elders. Therefore, the conclusion that holds the clearest Biblical support is that elders *should* be males, since nothing to the contrary is mentioned elsewhere.

Having said that, a stronger argument could be made for the possibility of women holding the position of deacon i.e. deaconesses.

In 1 Tim 3:11, Paul outlines very brief qualifications for women deacons.

*In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

Again, the translation is unclear as to whether *gyne* should be translated as “woman” or “wife.” However, there is more support across Biblical scholarship that the better translation is “woman” in this case and that the early church may have had deaconesses.

There are TWO arguments for this:

- i. If it were to be translated as “wife” then it is odd that Paul would outline qualifications for the wives of deacons and not of elders. Should not the wives of elders be held to a higher standard compared to those of deacons? This absence is notable.
- ii. While unclear, there may be Biblical precedent for deaconesses. The most notable being Phoebe of Cenchreae who is described as a servant (or deacon) of the church (Romans 16:1-2). It is unclear whether she is described as a generic servant i.e. minister and fellow believer or as holding the position of deaconess. However, it is something to consider.

Despite the above arguments, it is unclear why the following verse seems to assume a deacon will be a man (“faithful to his wife”). The passage structure makes it unclear whether v. 11 is referring to wives of deacons or female deacons. Therefore, the only conclusive thing we can say about the matter of female deacons is that it carries more Biblical, historical, and scholarly support than female elders.

Given that there is a possibility that Paul made explicit space for female deacons it accentuates his silence on female elders. The notable difference in function between an elder and deacon primarily being their teaching role.

What was the unique element of the teaching role elders held?

Based on the little that is revealed in Scripture and what we know of church history, the elders were the primary teachers of their local congregation and were responsible for interpreting and instructing their congregation in the apostle’s teaching and the Scriptures. For example, prior to the formalisation of the Scriptural canon at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, each local congregation likely had their own selection of New Testament texts that the elder referred to and taught from. It was the elder who decided on the selection of texts and therefore acted as the primary influence and teacher of doctrine to the local congregation.

**Therefore**, if we were to apply this to our contemporary context, a church elder should hold the exclusive and unique responsibility of interpreting Scripture and upholding the doctrine of the local congregation. In terms of who should hold this position, there is stronger Biblical support that the position of church elder should be held by males.

Having said all this, there is a possibility that a woman could hold a senior leadership position in the church if it was held in conjunction with her husband. This would uphold the principle of upholding the created order in the family unit which consistently runs throughout Paul's instructions on the matter. It is also consistent with some instances of Christian couples serving together in Scripture e.g. Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:24-26; Romans 16:3), Andronicus and Junia (Romans 16:7).

## **FCC's Doctrinal Position**

1. We affirm ontological equality. Man and woman are created equal in the sight of God ontologically - essential worth, value, standing, gifting etc. Man and woman are created in the image of God.
2. We affirm divinely ordained headship. God has clearly defined for us headship in the family, church, and society. When we embrace Biblical order, we best reflect the image of God.
3. We affirm the need for male-female partnership in fulfilling God's will and God's work. We need each other.
4. We affirm all the guiding principles in Scripture with regards to the appointment of one into leadership regardless of gender.
5. Women should be allowed to take up any positions in ministry if they are called by God and affirmed by the church. This includes leading and teaching roles.
6. However, this needs to be balanced with the principle of male headship at home. The general principle we see in Scripture is that the God-given roles in the family unit must be honoured inside and outside the Church.
7. The above two statements can best be expressed as ontological equality and functional responsibility. We are equal in spiritual standing but not in functional responsibility. We are egalitarian in standing, value and gifting but complementarian in responsibilities and roles.
8. The Senior Pastor is, in biblical terms, considered the chief elder of the local church. As such the role of a Senior Pastor can either be held by a male figure or a husband-and-wife couple (taking Aquila and Priscilla, Andronicus and Junia as biblical precedence for this). Under and alongside male eldership, female leaders in the local church are free to exercise their gifting and fulfill their God-given roles. In the context of FCC, this includes being appointed as Pastors.
9. In biblical terms, members of the LAT (Leadership Advisory Team) are considered ruling elders and therefore must be held by male figures or husband-and-wife couples. FCC's eldership (i.e. LAT and Senior Pastor) form the final authority in determining how Scripture is to be interpreted and taught in the church. All ruling elders must have the aptitude to teach but not all may be gifted with the teaching gift.
10. The preaching and teaching team contributes to the theological formation of the church and assist the elders to finalize the doctrinal positions of the church to ensure that it is aligned to the Word of God.
11. While we have a stated position with regards to the role of women in ministry, we seek to have a magnanimous spirit and not allow this to be a basis of division with other churches who do not hold the same position as we do.