

Biblical Eldership
A paper for the elders of
Calvary Chapel

Andrew Micklefield
Fall 2008

Contents

Page 2	Qualities of Elders Duties of Elders
Page 3-4	Duties of Elders (continued) The Process for Bringing on New Elders The Importance of Humility
Page 5	Why Not Female Elders?
Page 7	Expectations of Elders At Calvary Chapel
Page 8	Chart: A Comparison and Analysis of 1 Timothy 3.2-11 and Titus 1.6-9; the two primary eldership texts in the New Testament
Page 9	Appendix 1: Should All Elders Preach and Teach Regularly on Sunday Mornings?
Page 10	Appendix 2: Should rebellious children force an elder to step down?
Page 11	Appendix 3: Does being “the husband of one wife” disqualify previously divorced elders?
Page 12	Manhood, Womanhood, and the Freedom to Minister. A sermon by John Piper.
Page 15	Recommended Reading on Eldership and Biblical Leadership

Qualities of Elders - 1 Tim 3:2-11, Titus 1:6-9

Myth #1: An elder must be older

Truth: “don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young” (1 Tim 4v12)

Myth #2: It’s wrong / proud to want to be an elder

Truth: Desiring to be an elder is good (1 Tim 3v1)

Myth #3: Elders need credentials

Truth: Character is the only qualification for Godly leadership (1 Tim 3:2-11)

Myth #4: Male-only eldership is sexist and limits women

Truth: Male eldership releases women and protects everyone; and wives join the team too

- the NT and OT pattern is that elders were always men – we can’t ignore that!
- Some argue that this is cultural; we disagree and feel this model isn’t “just because,” but will promote optimal life and health for everyone.
- There is a Biblical pattern of God holding *men* primarily responsible to care and provide for Christian family and social units including families and churches – which includes ensuring women are released to all God has for them.
- While we’re most comfortable with elders being men, much is discussed with wives too, and the couples meet frequently as a team.

Duties of Elders

Elders work – as God directs

- Being an elder is “a fine work” (1 Tim. 3:1) yet “hard work” (1 Thess 5:12), not just meetings or positions. The Greek word *kopiaō* translated “work,” means labour or hard work requiring effort
- We do not want to burn out elders (and thus damage the church) by placing unreasonable workloads on them, so must agree on expectations and responsibilities. It’s important to remember that Jesus’ yoke “fits perfectly” and His burden “is light” (Mt 11:28-30), also that the will of God is “good, pleasing and perfect.”

Elders serve as a team

- The Bible never presents an elder governing alone (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14, Phil 1:1, 1 Pet 1:1, 5:1); it is always a team, and the New Testament models this as normal for every church (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5).
- Benefits of teams include sharing duties, balancing personalities and gifts, and increased productivity.

1. Elders set vision and direction

We read of “The elders who direct the affairs of the church” (1 Tim. 5:17) and see that the elders received and distributed gifts and money (Acts 11:29-30).

2. Elders establish values by teaching and preaching (1 Tim 5:17)

Note this verse suggests a team, and that not all have to preach and teach.

3. Elders commission & release people to service and ministry

This happened to Timothy (1 Tim 4:14), note too the elders prayed *and prophesied* – they were spiritually fit and dynamic, and released Timothy into his ministry in Ephesus.

4. Elders care and pray for people

Paul encouraged the Ephesian elders to “Be shepherds of the church of God,” (Acts 20:28). In Acts 11:30 elders oversaw distributions to the poor. And James writes, “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14), suggesting that God gives elders special authority / responsibility in a church.

5. Elders settle disputes & difficulties

The controversy about how Gentiles responded to Jewish laws was decided by the “apostles and elders” (Acts 15:6) who in turn communicated the decision to the churches (Acts 15:22, 16:4). Modern-day disputes may include divorce and remarriage situations or the wisdom of building a large facility. While the final authority rests with the elders, they are wise to consult with the congregation and other leaders.

6. Elders are called, not contracted

- Acts 20:28 The Holy Spirit – not any Pastor, group or person – chooses elders; we should look for what God is already doing as without His call and grace, “eldering” becomes a burden rather than a blessing.
- Rom 12:6-8 - Leadership is a spiritual gift, not a task or contracted duty.
- 1 Peter 5:2 – elders (and their wives) should therefore serve willingly, not grudgingly, from a conviction that this is God’s will for them, not out of any sense of duty, obligation or need
- Acts 14:23 – elders were sometimes installed with prayer and fasting, indicating the necessity of God’s leading and the importance of their role in the church. Paul similarly cautioned Timothy to “not be hasty” (1 Tim 5:22) with installing elders.

The Process for Bringing on New Elders

Gather suggestions from current elders and the congregation

Discern possible elders by prayer and the congregation’s suggestions, also with apostolic input.

Approach those we feel God might be calling to discuss nature of the future (which will vary)

Present those who wish to continue in this process to the congregation, invite feedback.

Appoint elders who have God’s call and the congregation’s endorsement (as per feedback).

The Importance of Humility

“One quality which has not been mentioned thus far, but which I feel is of the utmost importance for eldership and the ministry it involves is **humility**. The Apostle Paul reminds the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:19), that he “served the Lord with all humility and with tears and trials”. The scriptures teach us that God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud. The business of laying down your life for others demands nothing less than the grace of God and God’s demands humility. Humility is the gracious acknowledgement of God’s ability, strength, power and faithfulness.

Humility is a basic ingredient for relationship and is necessary for the harmony and unity of God’s people (John 13). Jesus said that His government belonged to the humble when he referred to the poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3). Humility is an act of spiritual warfare Peter and James tell us. Because God gives grace to the humble, we are to submit to God or humble ourselves under His mighty hand resist the devil (James 4:6,7; 1 Peter 5:5-9). Jesus describes himself as gentle and humble of heart (Matt. 11:29) this facilitates our coming to Jesus and learning from Him. The Elder that exhibits this quality of humility will make it easier for people to come and learn from Jesus as well.” – Ron MacLean

**A Comparison and Analysis of 1 Timothy 3.2-11 and Titus 1.6-9;
the two primary eldership texts in the New Testament**

1Ti 3:2-11 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (3) not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (4) He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, (5) for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (6) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. (7) Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (8) Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. (9) They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. (10) And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. (11) Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

Tit 1:6-9 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. (7) For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, (8) but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. (9) He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

1 Timothy 3	Titus 1	Underlying Quality
“must be above reproach” v2	“...is above reproach” 2x in v6, 7	Generally, no areas of concern; same root word as “eulogy” – there should be much good to say about them
“the husband of one wife” v2	“the husband of one wife” v6	Good husband, moral purity, lit. “a one-woman man” = not a flirt or inappropriate with women
“sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable” v2	“self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined” v8	Possessing a clear mind, good judgment, sensible, respectable, self-controlled, trustable
“hospitable” v2	“hospitable” v8	Hospitable, others-conscious
“able to teach” v2	“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” v9	Must love and know his Bible, and be able to teach others how to use and apply it, able to sniff out wrong thinking / teaching, though may not be a “pulpit preacher.”
“not a drunkard, not violent but gentle” v3	“not... quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent” v7	Self controlled, with no social issues, gracious, meek.
“not a lover of money” v3	“not... greedy for gain” v7	Generous, not greedy or materialistic
“He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive” v4-5	“and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination (NLT: ‘don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious’)” v6	Home life in order. Note: boys considered men at age 13, full adult status solidified with marriage which occurred in mid teens for women, late teens for men.
“He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit” v6	“He must not be arrogant” v7	Not a new Christian, tried and true, and humble.
“he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace” v7	“above reproach” 2x in v6, 7	Must model personal and relational integrity.

Why Not Female Elders?

If there is any part of this document likely to cause contention, this is it. The concept of male eldership is frequently perceived as sexist, discriminatory, rigid and closed-minded. For those wanting to look more deeply into this issue, John Piper's sermon, *Manhood, Womanhood and the Freedom to Minister* is attached, and my paper about gender roles, *Equal But Not the Same* is available as a download from www.thecalvarywebsite.com For those wanting an even deeper study, see Piper & Grudem, [Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood](#).

The Bible consistently honours women, giving them prominence at key points in the story line: the promise of redemption is given to Eve (Genesis 3.15); Mary finds favour with God and becomes the mother of Jesus (Luke 1.30). Women are the first to proclaim the news that Jesus is alive (Luke 24.22-24 – note that no “good” Jewish lawyer would use women as primary witnesses in any court, they were seen as unreliable, but the New Testament records women as seeing and telling about the empty tomb before men). In the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Matthew 1, four women are mentioned – all of questionable character in Jewish eyes; in a culture where genealogy proves pedigree, Jesus' ancestry includes four women: Tamar (v3) whose romantic life is horrific; Rahab (v5) a prostitute; Ruth (v5), a Moabite, descended from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his own daughter (Genesis 19:30-37; Deuteronomy 23:3); and Bathsheba (v6), who committed adultery with David (1 Chronicles 3). These women, though stained by social disgrace, are the very ones held up at the beginning of the New Testament as those helping bring the Saviour into the world. Later, Paul commends Timothy's mother and grandmother who taught him the gospel (2 Timothy 3.14 and 1.5), and encourages older women to teach younger women (Titus 2.3). Priscilla and her husband together “expounded the way of God more accurately” to Apollos, who later became a key leader in the church (Acts 18.26).

But despite this repeated honour, the Biblical pattern is to hold men primarily responsible for the protection, provision and direction, particularly in families and churches. This does not appear after the fall, but before it, which means, it's not a sinful idea, but part of God's original plan. God created male and female both in His image and blessed both equally (Genesis 1.26-28); but a close reading of the story reveals the nature of Adam and Eve's roles differed. God gave Adam primary responsibility in the garden (Genesis 2.16-19), and after the fall, came looking for Adam (Genesis 3.9), not Adam and Eve. And although Eve took the fruit and followed the serpent's temptation to eat, the apostle Paul refers to Adam when he talks about the fall (Romans 5.14; 1 Corinthians 15.22,45). This seems hardly fair! But it reveals that Adam held primary responsibility for the relationship.

The Old Testament elders were men, the Hebrew word literally meant “bearded one.” Women like Deborah who took primary leadership shamed men too scared to lead in conflict.

Although men and women accompanied Jesus (Luke 8.1-3), he chose twelve male disciples as the primary heirs of his ministry (Matthew 10.1ff). Some say this was cultural, but this would seem odd as at many other times Jesus challenged the culture, even as it pertained to women. Jesus – a rabbi himself – countered Jewish culture by encouraging women to learn (Luke 10.39-42), speaking to them alone (John 4.6-26), defending them (John 8.3-11) and befriending them (John 11.5).

Paul later teaches that husbands are to exercise Christlike headship over their wives, who are to “submit” to them (Ephesians 5.22-25, Colossians 1.18-19). But this headship and submission is not dominance or bossiness or any other perversion of leadership we see so often. It is rather, “as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her.” The godly leadership husbands are called to initiate should mirror the loving servanthood of Christ toward the church. And women are to imitate Christ too, as 1 Corinthians 11:3 states, “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and *the head of the woman is man*, and *the head of Christ is God*.” In his relationship to the Father, Christ models submission; in his relationship to the church he models headship. It is critical to understand that there is no inequality between the Father and the Son; Jesus is not “below” God the Father; he is not less than or subservient to. The Bible never turns headship-submission partnerships into enforced hierarchy, in fact “the greatest among you must be your servant” (Matthew 23.11), a principle that was modeled by Jesus who, “knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist” (John 13:3-4). This is what godly headship looks like – “even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her.”

Naturally, the pattern of male headship carries into the church, which is called the “family of God” five times in the New Testament (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15 and 5:4; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 4:17). Furthermore, Paul uses family language like “brothers” and “brothers and sisters” repeatedly throughout his letters. Within the context of church life, elders take primary responsibility for church oversight and governance (1 Timothy 2, see Piper’s sermon attached for a detailed analysis of this). Our understanding and experience of this setup is that it actually releases women who can serve, minister, preach and lead. But when it comes to governmental leadership, God calls male elders to lead churches humbly and selflessly. And by God’s grace we will follow Christ’s example of headship in serving and laying down our lives too.

Expectations of Elders At Calvary Chapel

This is not a test or a “try harder” list, but a summary of what we feel should be natural for those with grace to be elders. These things should grow happily in an elder’s heart; they are not intended as “can you do this?” but “is God already doing this in and through you?” To avoid the pain of misplaced hopes, it is wise to only appoint what is already happening. As elders, we must model what we want to reproduce in the church; we must be what we want the church to become. The weight of this call should drive us to our knees in search of God’s grace; it may also reduce our options in terms of behaviour, lifestyle and “free time.” And we can’t afford to sin; communion with Christ is so precious; people are so important to God; and Hell is so real that we must guard our hearts with all diligence and watch ourselves to ensure we live lives worthy of the gospel. Desiring God’s grace to remain with us, we feel this list is feasible for those called to be elders. Each of us will always have an area to grow in, but good spiritual health is necessary for spiritual leadership, and immature leaders can plug God’s blessing in a church.

1. Personal **Devotion**

- Personal regular and meaningful prayer and Bible reading
- spiritual disciplines; prayer (including tongues), reading (including devotional / theological non Bible), fasting, self denial / sacrifice, prayer ministry, aware of situations in the church

2. Personal **Attitude / demeanour**

- A learner, not a “know it all,” teachable, adjustable; one who wants what is right and good more than their preference; one who wants God’s will more than their way

3. A Healthy **Marriage**

- Husband willing to sacrifice, care for, serve and confront his wife and children
- Wife submissive, modest, kind, speaking honourably about and to her husband, able to minister and modelling Holy Spirit life, not sour or bitter
- Husband and wife praying and reading together regularly
- Kids respectful, well behaved, not out of control

4. Contributing to the **Prayer-life** of the Church

- Pre-service prayer and morning service on Sundays; praying for people in cells and on Sundays
- Praying with the other elders at weekly elders prayer meeting

5. **Giving:** Tithing & Generosity

- Tithing to Calvary Chapel and generous with money / things / home and time

6. **Service:** Faithfully Serving (has found “niche” in the church and proven himself)

- Proven faithful in serving the church (“it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” 1 Corinthians 4.2)
- giving of time; available more than unavailable

7. **Hospitality**

- Regular hospitality, “stepping in” to people’s lives

8. Demonstrating **Spiritual Gifts / Dynamism / Passion / Life of the church**

- Contributing to Holy Spirit life-flow of church: body ministry, prayer, prophecy, Scripture...
- “Engaged” during corporate worship, visibly passionate for God,
- A spiritual and practical initiative-taker in the church, a faith-builder
- Participating around the church, teachable, not sitting back; approachable; friendly

9. **Pastoral and Relational Reality**

- Can name their personal pastor, who they are open and vulnerable with, sharing sins and temptations; pastoring people they can name.
- Relationally vulnerable publically (as appropriate, i.e. Not standoffish) and privately

We feel this amounts to about 6-8 hours a week, but emphasize it is all what God does in and through us, not what we do “for God.” “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen!” (Romans 11.36).

Appendix: Should All Elders Preach and Teach Regularly on Sunday Mornings?

Paul's instruction to Timothy (1 Tim 3.2, 2 Tim 2.24) that an elder must be "able to teach" can seem daunting. Many churches take this at face value and demand all their elders preach on equal rotation; others accept that while some have a teaching gift, even those without it should learn to preach and do so regularly. I do not believe the Bible teaches that all elders must teach a congregation in a Sunday morning context, though I do believe all elders must be "able to teach" in that they must be Biblically competent and thereby able to discern truth from error. This ability may include Sunday morning preaching, but I do not think it has to. In my understanding, the whole thrust of New Testament ministry is team, with each doing his part so that all contribute to the common good. I think this is echoed in 1 Timothy 5.17 where Paul writes, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, *especially those* who labour in preaching and teaching." In my mind, this denotes that there are elders who do not labour in teaching and preaching. This does not mean non teaching elders can not open their Bibles and encourage people, or exhort people, or share a word, or prophecy or preach from an insight in the Scripture, but the labour of preaching and teaching as a primary job description does not – it would appear – applied to all elders. Understanding Scripture is not optional, Biblical competence is not optional, reading and awareness are not optional, and insofar as these things are evident, such men teach people the ways of God in many settings – conversations and small groups to name two - but we cannot deny that many elders do not have grace for regular Sunday preaching. We should all seek to expand whatever measure of gift we have, including our ability to lead and teach, but that is quite different to rotating elders on equal measure for Sunday morning pulpit ministry.

Appendix 2: Should rebellious children force an elder to step down?

1 Timothy 3.4-5 says that an elder “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?” And Titus 1.6 states similarly that elders children must be “believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination (NLT: ‘don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious’).” In light of these verses, what are we to make of the elder whose teenage kids harden their hearts toward God and the church? Wanting to be biblically faithful, some censor an elder whose teens persist in rebellion; and sometimes an elder steps down with a sense of shame over his own children's (and his?) failure.

A plain reading rightly raises the bar regarding our children's behaviour. We should aim to model godly parenting; after all, our kids are a reflection of us. “For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”

But there is another side too, for childhood in New Testament times ended at age 13 when boys – now men – pursued vocational training, and girls – now women – prepared for marriage. So when Paul writes about “children,” he is not thinking of “teenagers” in the same way we do; because teenagers were busy working and having families, not sitting at home playing video games. This does not let the elder whose son is a lazy delinquent off the hook, but if – despite Mom and Dad's prayer and guidance – such a teen turns his back on God; I am not sure Paul would see them as *children* the same way we might. If instead of viewing children as children until age 18, we treated them as mini-adults at 13, we might cultivate their adolescent maturity, and on the flip-side not feel bound by the Bible's instructions regarding “children” when they choose poorly. A fourteen year old is no longer a “child” in the same sense as their ten year old sibling. But even so, when a teen living under his parents roof persists in all-out rebellion, parents should perhaps re-evaluate their ministry priorities between church and home. Another expression of godly parental leadership may be to kick an uncontrollable teen out of the house or let the police deal with their disturbance of the peace. Whatever happens, parental passivity is not an option, and the line between teenage submission and freedom must be kept in tension, but need not disqualify an otherwise qualified and faithful elder when the child/teen chooses in the wrong direction.

Appendix 3: Does being “the husband of one wife” disqualify previously divorced elders?

While the phrase “the husband of one wife” has generated much scrutiny and interpretation (see comments on “a one-woman man,” above), some interpret it – among other things - to prohibit divorced men from eldership. I would suggest that the issue is not so much divorce, but of the nature of the divorce.

If by his own sin a man destroyed his marriage *before coming to Christ*, I am not sure that can be held against him, particularly when years of devotion to Christ with evidence of conversion separate the events and there is no possibility of reconciliation (either or both parties are remarried).

But if by his own sin a man destroyed his marriage *while knowing the gospel but ignoring it*, bigger questions need to be asked which would likely (except possibly in some rare case that I cannot imagine) disqualify him.

If a man’s wife leaves him for another man and as best he could, the abandoned husband fights for his marriage which fails anyway; I do not see why the sin of the adulterous wife should handicap her ex-husband for the rest of his life.

Divorces are messy, and no quick answer will solve every question. It’s probably best to adopt a “one at a time” policy with the spirit of the above guidelines in view. May God give existing elders His great wisdom to navigate through these kinds of knotty questions which are so common in our culture.

Appendix 4: Manhood, Womanhood, and the Freedom to Minister

By John Piper, June 18, 1989

[1 Timothy 2:8-15](#)

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

What we saw [last week](#) from [Ephesians 5:32](#) was that marriage is a mystery. God gave it a meaning at the beginning of creation that was not fully revealed for a long time. But now it's made plain in the New Testament. And the mystery is this: marriage is an image or picture of Christ's relationship to his bride the church. A husband and a wife are meant by God to be living images of Christ and the church in relationship to each other.

Before Sin Ever Entered into the World

So when God created man and woman, he made us the way we are—with the differences of manhood and womanhood—so that we would be suited for these complementary roles (and for the other expressions of complementarity outside marriage). In this drama man was meant to play the role of Christ, and the woman was meant to play the role of his bride the church.

And we have stressed for five weeks now that these differences are not the result of sin. Sin didn't create manhood and womanhood. God did. And sin did not bring diversified, complementary roles into existence. God did. Before sin ever entered the world, God ordained and fitted Adam to be a loving, caring, strong leader for his wife Eve. And before sin entered the world, God ordained and fitted Eve to be a partner who supports and honors that leadership and helps carry it through. Both in the image of God. Both equal in their God-like personhood. But also different in their manhood and womanhood. The pattern was beautiful. They respected each other and served each other and complemented each other and enjoyed each other.

What Sin Ruined and Christ Recovered

What sin did was ruin this harmony. Sin made men abandon servant-leadership and become passive or harsh and insensitive and uncaring, or some other distortion of biblical headship. And sin distorted the woman's support and honor into manipulation or defiance or helplessness or some other distortion of true biblical submission.

So what Paul did in [Ephesians 5](#) (as we saw last week) is call for a recovery of God's original idea. He doesn't abolish what God created at the beginning. He wants to get back to it: true

biblical headship and true biblical submission. Here's the way we defined these two realities from our study last week:

- Headship is the divine calling of a husband to take primary responsibility for Christ-like servant leadership, protection, and provision in the home.
- Submission is the divine calling of a wife to honour and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts.

When a husband leads like Christ and a wife responds like the bride of Christ, there is a harmony and mutuality that is more beautiful and more satisfying and more fruitful than any pattern of marriage created by man. God loves his people and he loves his glory. And therefore when we follow his idea of marriage, we are most satisfied and he is most glorified.

The Real Test of Whether We've Grasped This

Now the real test I think of whether we have grasped the biblical essence of manhood and womanhood and affirm it as true and beautiful—the real test is whether Paul's application of it to the life of the church surprises and offends us or not. If the New Testament roles for man and woman in marriage are rooted not in sinful pride and not in cultural expectations, but in God's original design for creation, then how would you expect this original design to express itself in the life of the church? That's what we have before us today in [1 Timothy 2:11-14](#).

Let's seat ourselves before these unpopular verses and listen for a few minutes, and see if the story they tell is really as unattractive as so many think it is.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

I think what we need to do in order to understand the submissiveness in this text is patiently think through the meaning of "silence" ("Let a woman learn in silence") and the meaning of "teaching" ("I do not permit a woman to teach") and the meaning of "authority" ("or to have authority over men"). So let's take these one at time.

1. "Silence"

First, "silence." Verse 11: "Let a woman learn in silence." Notice that the word "silence" is used two other times in nearby verses.

The word for silence here (*hesuchia*) is used earlier in verse 2 of this chapter (*hesuchion*). But there it refers to the "quiet" life which all godly people should lead. "Pray . . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way." This gives you the tone and the extent of the word. It doesn't refer to absolute silence: a "quiet" and peaceable life is not a life of total silence. It's a life untroubled and serene and content. So the silence doesn't seem to be total. It's more like what we would call "quietness."

You can see this especially at the end of verse 12. The same word is used again. But this time you can tell what Paul has in mind by its opposite. He says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or

to have authority over men, [literally:] but to be silent." "Not to have authority over men, but to be silent." In other words this quietness is the opposite of exercising authority over men. "Don't exercise authority over men, instead be silent."

So what sort of quietness does Paul have in mind? It's the kind of quietness that respects and honors the leadership of the men God has called to oversee the church. Verse 11 says that the quietness is "in all submissiveness," and verse 12 says the quietness is the opposite of "authority over men," and so the point is not whether a woman says nothing, but whether she is submissive and whether she supports the authority of the men God has called to oversee the church.

Quietness means not speaking in a way that compromises that authority.
We'll come back in a minute and be more specific about just what this submission is.

2. "Teaching"

The second thing we need to look at is the reference to teaching in verse 12. How extensive is Paul's prohibition when he says, "I permit no woman to teach"? To answer this, one thing we can do is look at other places where Paul and others talk about women teaching. For example in [Titus 2:3](#) he says that the older women are to teach the younger women (at the end of the verse): "they are to teach what is good, and so train the younger women to love their husbands and children."

Another example is [2 Timothy 3:14](#) where Paul tells Timothy to remember from whom he learned the Scriptures. And the persons he has in mind (we can tell from [2 Timothy 1:5](#)) are Eunice and Lois, Timothy's mother and grandmother. (His father was not a believer or even a Jew, [Acts 16:3](#).)

One other example is Priscilla. It says in [Acts 18:26](#), "When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately."
So, it's not likely that Paul is saying in [1 Timothy 2:12](#) that every kind of teaching is forbidden to women. There are examples of them teaching younger women, teaching children, and in some way teaming up with their husbands to give private instruction when someone is confused or uninformed like Apollos. Those are just some examples. Is it possible to generalize, then, about what Paul does have in mind here when he says, "I do not permit a woman to teach"? I think the safest thing to do is let the next phrase guide us. The next phrase is, ". . . or exercise authority over men." "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over men."

Instead of letting the word "teach" mean anything we want it to mean or think it might mean, it's safer to say, it probably means a kind of teaching that somehow relates to authority. Teach and exercise authority go together. So at least one general thing we can say about women teaching is that Paul forbids it when it is part of the exercise of authority over men.

That leads us to the third question, namely, what is this "authority" referred to in verse 12?

3. "Authority"

The key that unlocks this door is a very interesting observation. When you read the rest of 1 Timothy about the role of elders in the church, what you find is that the elders had two basic responsibilities: they were to govern and they were to teach. You can see this in the qualifications of 3:1-7, but the easiest place to see it is in 5:17, "Let the elders who rule [or govern] well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."

Elders rule or govern, and elders teach or preach. Back in [Acts 20:28](#), you may recall, the elders in the church at Ephesus were called by the Holy Spirit and made "overseers" and charged with "pasturing" or feeding the flock, that is, teaching the whole counsel of God.

I don't think it's coincidental that what Paul says in [1 Timothy 2:12](#) is that he does not permit a woman to teach and exercise authority over men. He is saying in essence: I do not permit women to fill the office of elder in the church. The elders are charged with the leadership and instruction of the church. That's a summary of their job. So when Paul puts those two things together and says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority," the most natural sense is, "I do not permit a woman to assume the office of elder in the church."

So the authority Paul has in mind in [1 Timothy 2:12](#) is the authority of elders. And what is that supposed to look like? Well we saw already from Jesus in [Luke 22:26](#) what it's supposed to look like: "Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves."

Paul said in [2 Corinthians 10:8](#) and [13:10](#) that God gave him authority in the church not for tearing down or destroying but for building up. And Peter said to the elders of the churches ([1 Peter 5:3](#)), "Do not domineer over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock."

In other words, elder-authority is servant-authority. Elder-leadership is servant-leadership. That's why teaching is at the heart of this calling. Elder-authority leads by persuasion—by teaching—not by coercion or political maneuvering. Elder-authority is always subordinate to biblical texts. It can always be called to account by Scripture. Therefore teaching is the primary instrument of leadership in the church.

Defining Authority and Submission

I think it would be helpful to step back here and try to do for the concepts of authority and submission in the church what we did for the concepts of headship and submission in the home, namely, give a crisp definition of each.

- "Authority" refers to the divine calling of spiritual, gifted men to take primary responsibility as elders for Christ-like servant-leadership and teaching in the church.
- "Submission" refers to the divine calling of the rest of the church, both men and women, to honour and affirm the leadership of the elders and to be equipped by it for the hundreds and hundreds of various ministries available to men and women in the service of Christ.

And that last point is very important. For men and women who have a heart to minister—to save souls and heal broken lives and resist evil and meet needs—there are fields of opportunity that are simply endless. God intends for the entire church to be mobilized in ministry, male and female. Nobody is to be at home watching soaps and reruns while the world burns. And God intends to equip and mobilize the saints through a company of spiritual men who take primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church.

Closing Appeal

There are many voices today who claim to know a better way to equip and mobilize the men and women of the church for ministry. But I commend to you this morning with all my heart the plain meaning of these verses:

- That manhood and womanhood mesh better in ministry when men take primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church.
- That manhood and womanhood are better preserved and better nurtured and more fulfilled and more fruitful in this church order than in any other.

I commend this to you for your belief and for your behavior, because

- this is the way the Scriptures teach us to order the church,
- and God inspired the Scriptures,
- and God is good.

My hope [next Sunday](#), in the last of [this series](#), is to pick up verses 13 and 14, and then paint the big picture of what it means to be man and woman in all of life.

© Desiring God

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Desiring God.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org

Recommended Reading on Eldership & Biblical Leadership

(Most of titles are still in print or you can borrow any from me if you're interested)

- Baxter, Richard, *The Reformed Pastor*, (Banner of Truth) 1656, republished, 1974.
- Blackaby, Henry & Richard, *Spiritual Leadership; moving people on to God's agenda*, (Broadman & Hollman: Nashville) 2005.
- Blackaby, Henry & Norman, *Experiencing Prayer with Jesus; the power of His presence and example*, (Multnomah: Sisters, Oregon) 2006.
- Coombs, Barney, *A Guide to Practical Pastoring*, (Sovereign World: Kent, England) 1999.
- Coombs, Barney, *Dealing With What Life Throws At You*, (STL Distribution North America) 2005.
- Grudem, Wayne ed, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, (Crossway: Wheaton, IL) 2002.
- Laniak, Timothy S, *Shepherds After My Own Heart; pastoral traditions and leadership in the Bible*, (IVP: Downers Grove) 2006.
- Piper, John and Wayne Grudem eds, *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood; a response to evangelical feminism*, (Crossway: Wheaton) 1991.
- Piper, John, *What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible*, (Crossway: Wheaton, IL) 1990.
- Simpson, Charles, *The Challenge to Care*, (Vine Books: Ann Arbor, MI) 1986. (esp. p51)
- Spurgeon, Charles, *Lectures to my Students*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids) reprint of 1954 edition.
- Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership*, (Lewis & Roth: Colorado Springs), 1995.