**BIBLICAL BASIS FOR AFFIRMING**

**THE CALL OF WOMEN TO ALL TYPES OF MINISTRY**

\*This bullet point summary is heavily based (in organization and content) on an article written by Dr. David Scholer, the late professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. The article is available in adapted form in the Fuller Seminary pamphlet on Women in Ministry, and it was originally published in “The Covenant Companion.”

\*\*Additional insights, especially on Paul’s view of women and the grammar of 1 Timothy 2 and 3, can be found in Philip Payne’s, *Man and Woman: One in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

There are strong practical and missional reasons to affirm the call of women into all types of ministry. Practically, why would we not want to unleash the giftedness of half of God’s people? Missionally, in a world where women serve in every other area of leadership, why would we create an unnecessary offense to the Gospel by precluding their leadership in the Church? But most importantly, we must ask ourselves, is the call of women into all ministries of the Church biblical? With love for those who may disagree, we nonetheless believe the answer is a resounding yes.

**THE BASIS IN CREATION**

* God creates both men and women in his image (Gen. 1:26-27).
* God charges both men and women to rule over his creation (Gen. 1:26-27).
* Adam and Eve are created as side-by-side, bone of bone partners. Since the Hebrew word translated as “helper” (Gen. 2:18) almost always (29 times) refers to God, it in no way denotes that woman is subservient to man.
* The man and woman sin together and are both held responsible (Gen. 3:1, 7).
* The power-struggle that ensues between men and women is a consequence of the fall not an ordinance of creation (Gen. 3:16).

***Bottom Line: God creates men and women to rule side-by-side over his creation, without assigning a hierarchical authority or relationship between them. Each gender is different and complementary. Both genders are necessary to reflect the fulness of God’s image.***

**THE BASIS IN JESUS’ MINISTRY**

* In Jesus’ day, women were viewed as inferior and subordinate to men in every area of life. Josephus, a Jewish historian wrote: “The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive.” She was to remain in the home and have no part in public learning or ministry.
* Jesus, by contrast, lifted up women and affirmed their value throughout his ministry.
  + He rejected the views that women are responsible for all sexual sin and that men can seek divorce for any reason (Matt. 5:28, 19:3-9).
  + Jesus graciously engaged women throughout his ministry (Mark 5:25-34; Luke 7:36-50, Jn 4:4-42; Jn 8:1-11), including those w/history of adultery or prostitution.
* Jesus discipled and taught women.
  + Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42), whom Jesus commended for sitting at his feet in the posture of a disciple with a rabbi
  + Samaritan Woman (John 4:4-42), who evangelized her entire town
* Women traveled with Jesus’ ministry and funded his ministry (Luke 8:1-3).
* Women were present at Jesus’ crucifixion and were the first witnesses to proclaim his resurrection (Luke 23:40, 55-56; 24:1).
* Seven known women (compare w/17 known men) were in Jesus’ devoted disciple group: Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene, the “other” Mary, Mary of Bethany, Joanna, Susanna, and Salome.

***Bottom Line: In a culture that treated women as absolutely inferior and subordinate to men, Jesus shattered social norms by not only ministering to women but by ministering with women. They were the only disciples who remained with him during his crucifixion and who were the first to proclaim the Gospel hope of his resurrection.***

**THE BASIS IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

* Women were part of the first church gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14), women joined the church (Acts 5:14), and women were arrested for their faith in Jesus (Acts 8:3).
* Women are mentioned as early church leaders, including the widows in Joppa, Timothy’s mother in Lystra, the women in Philippi, the prominent women in Thessalonica, the women in Berea, Damaris in Athens, Priscilla in Corinth, the wives in Tyre, and Philip the evangelist’s four daughters, who had the gift of prophecy.
* Peter interpreted the events of Pentecost to mean that in the last days the gifts of God’s Spirit had been poured out on “men and women” enabling them to prophesy (Acts 2:17).
* The church in Philippi was founded by Paul with a group of praying women. Lydia was the leader of this group who hosted the church in her home (Acts 16:11-40).
* Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, taught the Gospel to Apollos, who in turn became a noted teacher in the church (Acts 18:24-28). Priscilla is always mentioned first before her husband, which was unprecedented in ancient literature.

***Bottom Line: In the Book of Acts, women are frequently mentioned among those not only participating in the church but those who were leading the church. They too were given the Holy Spirit and the ability to prophesy (proclaim the truth of God’s Word). As Pentecost restores the unity of peoples who were scattered in Babel, it also restores the place of women, who had been subjugated to men in the curse of the fall.***

**THE BASIS IN PAUL’S LETTERS**

* Galatians 3:28 – **In the Gospel, prior walls of distinction and separation between ethnicity, class, and gender are broken down**. “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”
* 1 Corinthians 11:5 – speaks of **both men and women praying and prophesying in the gathered worship of the church**. Paul suggests in 1 Cor. 14:1-25 that prophecy is the most edifying type of speech that happens in worship. The Puritans, for example, used the terms “to prophesy” and “to preach” interchangeably as synonyms.
* Paul mentions 13 women by name who were **coworkers with him in ministry**.
  + 4 **house church leaders**: Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), Nympha (Col. 4:15), Apphia (Philemon 2), and Lydia (Acts 16). For instance, to say “Some from Chloe’s household have informed me there are quarrels among you” would be like saying today, “some from Bryan’s church have said there’s conflict among you.” Paul refers to Chloe as the leader of this family of believers.
  + 4 women who **“work very hard”** the Greek word ***ergozomai***, the term used by Paul to refer to his own special work of gospel ministry and the ministry of other church leaders (see chart below.). *Ergozomai* in Paul’s writings was not a casual term but almost a technical reference for colleague in Gospel ministry.

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| **Paul** | “I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or **labor** (*ergozomai*) in vain.” (Phil. 2:16) | “So that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I **strenuously contend**(*ergozomai*).”  (Col. 1:29) | “That is why we **labor** (*ergozomai*)and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God.”  (1 Tim. 4:10) | “I **worked harder** (*ergozomai*)than all of them [apostles]—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”  (1 Cor. 15:10) |
| **Church Leaders** | “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those who **work** (*ergozomai*) in preaching and teaching.”  (1 Tim. 5:12) | “Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who **work hard** (*ergozomai*)among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.”  (1 Thess. 5:12) |  |  |
| **Women** | “Greet Mary who **worked very hard** (*ergozomai*) for you.”  (Rom. 16:6) | “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who **work hard** (*ergozomai*) in the Lord.”  (Rom. 16:12) | “Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has **worked very hard** (*ergozomai*) in the Lord.”  (Rom. 16:12) |  |

* + 3 “fellow workers” – Euodia & Synteche (Phil. 4:2-3) and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3). “Fellow workers” is a term that Paul regularly used to refer to leaders in Gospel ministry.

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| **Euodia, Synteche, & Clement** | **Priscilla & Aquilla** | **Timothy** | **Titus** | **Philemon** | **Demas & Luke** | **Apollos** |
| “help these women since they have **contended at my side in the cause of the gospel**, along with Clement and the rest of my **co-workers**” (Phil. 4:3) | “my **coworkers** in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 16:3) | “Timothy, my **coworker**, sends his greetings” (Rom. 16:21) | “Titus, he is my partner and **co-worker** among you.” (2 Cor. 8:23) | “To Philemon our dear friend and **fellow worker**”(Phil. 1) | “Demas and Luke, my **fellow workers**” (Phil 24) | “For we [Paul and Apollos] are **co-workers** in God’s service” (1 Cor. 3:9) |

* + Phoebe delivers Paul’s letter to Rome and is designated “a servant of the church in Cenchreae” (Rom. 16:1-2). **Paul regularly used the term “servant” [*diakonos*] to refer to ministers of the Gospel. The term is alternately translated as minister.**

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| **Phoebe** | **Apollos & Paul** | **Timothy** | **Epaphras** | **Tychicus** | **Paul** | **Generally** |
| “a **servant** [*diakonos*] of the church in Cenchreae.” (Rom. 16:1) | What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only s**ervants** [*diakonoi*], through whom you came to believe.”  (1 Cor. 3:5) | “If you point these things out, you will be a good **servant** [*diakonos*] of Christ Jesus.” (1 Tim. 4:6) | “our dear **fellow servant**, who is a faithful **minister** [*diakonos*] of Christ.” (Col. 1:7) | “the dear brother and faithful **servant** [*diakonos*] in the Lord.” (Eph. 6:21) | “I became a **servant** [*diakonos*] of this gospel.” (Eph. 3:7) cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; Col. 1:23 | “he has made us competent as **ministers** [diakonoi] of a new covenant.” (2 Cor. 3:6) |

* + Paul refers to Junia (Rom. 16:7) as “outstanding among the apostles.” Paul is including Junia among **the highest level of early church leadership, the apostles**.

***Bottom Line: Paul says that though the Old Covenant and its gifts were mostly restricted to free, Jewish, men, in the New Covenant, these prior walls have been broken down. Men and women pray and prophesy in worship. Women lead churches in their homes. And women participated with men in the ministry of the Gospel, as Paul refers to them with the same terminology he applies to himself and other male ministers.***

**OBJECTIONS TO ADDRESS: 1 COR. 14:34-35, 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15, 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-12/TITUS 1:5-9**

* **1 Cor. 14:34-35** says that women should not speak in church but remain silent.
  + But in 1 Cor. 11:5 women are described as appropriately praying and prophesying in the church.
  + There is very strong textual evidence (the verse is not present in best and earliest manuscripts and it appears in varying locations) to suggest the verse is not original to Paul’s letter but a later addition.
  + Even if it is original, it must be understood in light of 1 Cor. 11:5, perhaps addressing the issue of women in Corinth (who were uneducated in Paul’s time) asking disruptive questions of their husbands during the service.
* **1 Timothy 2:11-15** includes an injunction in 2:11-12 that women should not “teach or assume authority over a man; but must remain quiet.”
  + **The key question is whether this is a universal prohibition of women teaching or having authority in the church or whether it is addressing a specific, temporary issue in the church in Ephesus.**
  + If taken to be a universal prohibition, then it prohibits all such teaching (evangelizing, writing, sharing, speaking, etc. not just preaching on Sunday mornings or holding a church office). In other words, those who don’t believe that women should be ordained as pastors and elders struggle greatly to apply this verse with consistency.
  + There are at least five key and heavily debated translation/interpretation questions in this passage.
    - The purpose of the letter. Respected commentators such as Douglas Moo, Gordon Fee, and William Mounce argue that Paul’s primary purpose in writing 1 Timothy is to address in the Ephesians church false teaching that was spreading especially among women (1:3-11, 1:18-20, 4:1-8, 5:11-15, 6:9-10, 6:20-21. This teaching seems to have taught that marriage was no longer necessary (1 Tim. 4:3), the resurrection had already taken place, (2 Tim. 2:17-18), and that women, therefore, including widows, had no need or use for men in their lives. Paul’s desire in chapter 2 is therefore to suppress false teaching by those who had been most effected by it: women.
    - The second issue is the verb translated “I do not permit.” Is this a permanent or temporary prohibition? Paul uses the verb *epitrepo* in the first person singular present active, a tense he very rarely uses for universal and permanent commands. In fact, all but one other usage of this verb in the Bible refers to a command given for a specific time for a short duration that is not universally applicable.
    - The third issue is whether *oude* “or”separates two prohibitions or merges one. Is Paul prohibiting a certain kind of authoritative teaching or is he prohibiting both teaching and exercising authority? Paul uses this same grammatical construction 11 times in the preceding verses of 1 Timothy 2 to convey a single idea. Those who have carefully studied this grammar (Philip Payne, Craig Blomberg, even Origen, etc.) see this as overwhelmingly likely that Paul is giving one prohibition, not two.
    - The most important issue is the translation of the Greek word *authentein* (authority). This is the only time it occurs in the New Testament. The typical word for authority is *exousia*. *Authentein*, which is used in other first century Greek texts to mean “murder,” means to usurp or abuse authority. It is a self-assumed authority. Paul is therefore prohibiting some form of abusive exercise of authority and teaching, not the appropriate exercise of teaching or authority in the church. The background that makes further sense of this is the heretical activity described in 1-2 Timothy, which was spreading especially among women (2 Tim. 3:6-7).
    - The fifth issue is how Paul uses the appeal to creation (vs. 13-14). Paul refers to the story in Genesis 3 of Eve and Adam as an example of the disastrous consequences when a woman was deceived, but it is not an appeal to the creation order. After all, if women are inherently disqualified from teaching and leadership because they are more prone to deception, then should men be disqualified because they are more prone to rebellion? Ultimately, though Eve was deceived, sin doesn’t get the last word in the history of women, as one day, just as promised in Genesis 3, a child would come into the world “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4), who would bring salvation to women and men. It is continuing to trust this Christ and to walk in his holiness and love that will save, not following the Satanic lies of the false teachers.

* **1 Timothy 3:1-12 and Titus 1:5-9** are the New Testament descriptions of the qualifications to serve as an overseer (elder) or a deacon. Some people argue that if an elder, as some English translations suggest is “to be a husband of one wife” then women cannot be overseers in the church since they can’t meet this qualification. Here are several reasons why we do not agree with that interpretation.
  + First, nowhere in either of these passages does Paul use the word “man,” “men,” or any masculine pronoun that excludes women from church office.
  + Second, he states that “anyone desiring the office of overseer desires a good work” in 3:1 and 3:5. “Anyone” is also the subject in 1:6. This word implies the eligibility of men and women since it is not further denoted otherwise.
  + Third, “husband of one wife” is a poor translation. The phrase is literally “one woman man” which excludes polygamists and adulterers from church office, but it cannot be a requirement for all church officers, since that would exclude Paul, Jesus, or any unmarried man. Further still, if every one of the descriptors is a requirement for all office holders, then only married men with at least two children who are believers (Titus 1:6) would be able to be overseers. Clearly this is not Paul’s intent…
  + Fourth, all of the qualifying character traits for overseers and deacons are also specifically used regarding women throughout 1 Timothy.
  + Fifth, women are specifically included in the church office of deacon (1 Tim 3:11). [Note: wives is not a justifiable translation here.] Paul likely doesn’t add a parallel description here for overseers, since in Ephesus he did not want to encourage women to pursue this role to propagate the false teaching.

***Bottom Line: Upon closer examination, these passages do not prohibit women from teaching or having positions of oversight and leadership in the church. It is unfortunate that many English translations (especially the ESV) choose to advance a particular line of interpretation on this issue that is not well supported in the original language.***