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 Title: “Women in the Church Assembled”
 Text: 1 Corinthians 14:34-36
 Theme:

Can adult women teach adult men? If so, when and why would this not violate the principles that appear in the New Testament? Are spiritual gifts gender qualified? Are offices inside the church gender qualified? What does it mean when it speaks of a woman being in subjection to a man? What does it mean when it says that a wife/woman is to keep silent in the church gathered? Can women be pastors/missionaries?

This topic is invasive in that it affects every area of our lives. Although the church is genderless in its position, it is not genderless in its practice. This is not wrong or evil, it is simply Scriptural. What impact this has in our everyday lives is difficult to completely understand.

I have an inherent blind spot in all of this because I am an adult male living in a patriarchal culture. However, this should not prevent us from seeking an expression of ministry that flows from a celebration of our mutual position in Christ.

An issue within this discussion is what Paul meant when he said man is the head of woman. Wayne Grudem and John Piper in their work, Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism (<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/cbmw/rbmw/chapter5.html>), argue for headship meaning authority and give three reasons as to why this is how we are to understand it.

First, its common usage means authority and not source.

Second, it is always used as authority in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint.

Finally, Paul’s own use of this word elsewhere speaks of authority and not source (Eph. 5:22-24; 1:20-22; Col. 2:10, 15).

He thus draws this conclusion concerning the idea of head in 1 Corinthians 11:2-10.

“Now we return to 1 Corinthians 11:3. If our interpretation is correct, then Paul is saying that Christ is the authority over every man, man is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ. Since Paul appeals to the relation between members of the Trinity, it is clear that he does not view the relations described here as merely cultural, or the result of the fall.”

Grudem ties the thoughts of chapter 11 with those of chapter 14 and concludes with the following remarks.

“I understand the major burden of 11:3-6, then, to be as follows: Women can pray and prophesy in public, but they must do so with a demeanor and attitude

that supports male headship because in that culture wearing a head covering communicated a submissive demeanor and feminine adornment. Thus, Paul does not forbid women to participate in public worship, yet he does insist that in their participation they should evidence a demeanor that is humble and submissive to male leadership.”

Because man is the authority over woman, Paul’s statement in 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 make sense.

So although women are to be in submission to men, the burden appears to be men leading.

There are two fundamental ideas that will govern what this means and how this expresses itself in local church ministry.

I. What is relational headship – economical (11:3-10)

The Amplified Bible makes reference to “her husband” as an interpretive note. But are we to understand this passage as relating only to husband and wives or does it have application to the local church?

Is the headship referenced in this paragraph only applicable in the context of a husband-wife relationship or does it reach beyond that? The context is that of the local church. The language used is not specifically referencing a husband and a wife, but men and women in general. There can be no question as to the headship of a husband in relation to his wife, but does the Scripture limit its discussion of headship only to the marriage relationship or does it reach into the church? I believe this headship reaches into the local church.

This idea exists inside of what is called the economy of God. Economy addresses the idea of how things work. This passage provides three foundational stones as it relates to the economy of God inside of marriage and the church.

Unfortunately, because of the fall and because of our culture such statements as those found in our passage cause (at least half of us here) to become uncomfortable. It is because of sin that we become uncomfortable when we read the following three thoughts: (1) Man is the head over woman (11:3), (2) women were created to bring honor to men (11:7), and (3) he was not created for her. She was created for him (11:9).

These same foundational ideas come into play in how we understand 14:34-36.

“When God’s people meet in church, the women must not be allowed to speak” (1 Cor. 14:33).

“If there is something they want to know, they can ask their husbands when they get home. It is disgraceful for women to speak in church” (1 Cor. 14:35).

Let us take our time to unpack this idea.

A. Man is the head over woman (11:3).

This headship is seen in 14:34, 35 and 1 Timothy 2:11 and 12.

Again, is the prohibition and direction only for married women or does it apply to all women? What does this headship mean? Whatever it means, it is similar to the headship God the Father has over Jesus Christ the Son. Verse 34 is a general appeal that is not targeting just married women. Verse 35 becomes specific when it directs those women who are married to seek answers from their husbands. If both verses refer only to married women, then single women are at liberty to violate the admonition found in this text.

Notice this same idea in Ephesians 5:22-24.

²² “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything” (Eph. 5:22-24).

Ephesians 5 is a specific command to married women where the application is far more focused than its general expression for all gender relationships within the local church. The general idea is captured in 1 Timothy 2:9-14. Although the same idea is found, it is not dealing specifically to married women, but to all women.

It is this same idea found in 1 Timothy 2:9-14.

⁹ “Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. ¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴ And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:9-14).

Although we wrestle with understanding what this means in a local church context and how this looks, I also believe we miss another point this passage assumes and that is men have the responsibility to lead in the home and at church.

These verses are not just teaching that wives should be in submission to their husbands, but that husbands must lead their wives. It is a tragedy visited upon the church of Jesus Christ to see homes and local churches that lack male leadership. The tragedy is not that our women are so well taught, but

that our men lack any interest in spiritual things or that they pay such little attention to their own spiritual well-being and that of their wife and children.

As husbands and fathers, we should seek to make the sufficiency and satisfaction of Jesus Christ a delightful pursuit for our wives and children. It is never a dangerous thing for your wife or child/children to love God too much. The benefit to you is incalculable. I would like to make three statements concerning this headship as it relates to marriage and to the local church.

1. As head, protect your wife and the women of a fellowship.
 - a. This protection is physical
 - b. This protection is emotional
 - c. This protection is spiritual

I use the word “protect” as from injury or harm. As husbands, and as men inside of a local church, we should guard the women of this fellowship from physical, emotional, and spiritual injury or harm.

In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul shares some guidelines as to how we are to interact as a fellowship with the opposite gender.

¹ “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, ² the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Tim. 5:1, 2).

2. As head, direct your wife and the women of a fellowship.
 - a. This direction concerns the end
(i.e. purpose for existing [“Where are we going?”])
 - b. This direction concerns the means to that end
(i.e. plan in existing [“How will we get there?”])
3. As head, respect your wife and the women of a fellowship.
 - a. This respect is physical (1 Pet. 3:7).

The Bible calls her “weaker.”

“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, **as with someone weaker, since she is a woman**; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

- b. This respect is emotional (Eph. 5:25-30).

You are to love your wife as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25-30).

²⁵ “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, ²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. ²⁸ So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; ²⁹ for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of His body” (Eph. 5:25-30).

I tell husbands all the time “Worship the ground your wife walks on” and “Do whatever is necessary for your wife to feel loved.”

As one gentlemen said, “Treat your wife like a thorough-bred and she will never become an old nag.”

c. This respect is spiritual (1 Pet. 3:7).

The Bible calls her “a fellow heir of the grace of life.”

“You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and **show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life**, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7).

We must never denigrate our sisters in Christ. They are fellow heirs of Christ just as we are.

1. Concerning Salvation - “In Christ” is mutually applicable for both genders.

Everything that we enjoy as His people because of the cross is without gender qualifiers. Men and women enjoy equal status in their reestablished relationship with God when He brings them to faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 6:9).

2. Concerning the Holy Spirit – Spiritual gifting is mutually applicable for both genders.
3. Concerning the Local Church – Positions within the local church do appear to be gender qualified.

B. Women were created to bring honor to men (11:7).

How a wife and other women function in relation to their husbands and other men is a glory to husbands, men, and the church of God.

C. He was not created for her. She was created for him (11:8, 9).

In both verses a strong contrasting conjunction is used. This thought reflects the reference in Genesis 2:18-23.

¹⁸ "Then the LORD God said, **It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.**' ¹⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, **but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.** ²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²² The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man' " (Gen. 2:18-23).

Genesis 2:18 - "*a helper suitable for him*" is not a second class position. This term "helper" in Hebrew is used most often for God who is our "helper." (Deuteronomy 33:29, Psalms 121:2, 124:8) <http://www.primi.org/women4.html>

A woman completes a man. This is not simply reflective of marriage, but of life. Men and women cannot exist in the absence of the other. They were designed by God to compliment the full imaging of God in the created arena.

This brings us to our second fundamental idea that will govern what this means and how this expresses itself in local church ministry.

II. What is relational equality – ontological (11:11, 12)

A. As far as the Lord is concerned, men and women need each other (11:11).

First Corinthians 11-14 clearly speak of God's gifting and membership within the one body as being genderless. Neither one can say of the other "I have no need of you" (12:14-26).

- "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (NAS) The Greek is "everyone" - men and women.
- 1 Corinthians 14:23, 23, 24 ("the whole church," "everyone" speaking tongues and prophesying)
- 1 Cor. 14:26 "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." (NIV)

Within the Tri-unity of God there is an ontological equality. Each one is equally and fully God although each one has a distinct function within the Trinity.

B. Everything comes from God (11:12).

This is the big idea. Although there is a distinction in function, there is no difference in essence. Ultimately all of us are created and He alone is the Creator. If I do not see how each one of us comes from God, then I will have a wrong view of who I am and who you are.

III. What does this look like in the local church?

A. What is meant by “keep silent in the churches?” (1 Cor.14:34)

The verb *sigao* is found infrequently in the Bible—some 19 times in the Greek Old Testament, and less than a dozen times in the New Testament. A careful examination of the term reveals that the context identifies the nature of the “silence” under consideration.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the verb *sigao* is used three times.

- One who has the gift of tongues is to keep silence if he has no interpreter to use with his alien audience (28).
- If a brother is speaking, and another receives a more current revelation, the former is to keep silence (30).
- Finally, women are to keep silence (34).

The first two prohibitions demand silence only in the matters being discussed. They do not forbid these men to otherwise speak consistent with their divine obligations.

This does not demand that a woman be *absolutely* silent at church. Rather, in harmony with what the apostle taught elsewhere (1 Tim. 2:12), the woman is not to speak or teach in any way that violates her *gender* role. She is not to occupy the *position of a public teacher*, in such a capacity as to stand before the church and function as the teacher (or co-teacher) of a group containing adult men.

In assuming this official capacity, she has stepped beyond her authorized sphere, and she violates scripture. Thus, *Silence not absolute, but qualified by context.*

B. What is meant by “do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man?” (1 Tim. 2:12)

APPLICATION (What is the NEXT STEP?)

1. The idea of ministry distinction is biblical.
 - Men are to lead.
 - i. Because the offices of elder/deacon are positions of authority, women are not to occupy those positions. If the position of pastor is an expression of the office “elder,” then women should not be pastors by office. This does not limit their function and gifting, only their title or office.
 - Women are to follow.
 - i. Although women cannot occupy headship (i.e. authority) in the home and local church, apart from this they can engage in any ministry gifting and expression as a man.

“If anyone wants to argue about this, my answer is that this is what we teach, and all the churches agree with me” (1 Cor. 11:16).

We should have men who gladly lead this fellowship, and the women of this fellowship should gladly submit to male leadership both here and in the home.

2. The idea of positional equality is biblical.

Somehow we need to cultivate a spirit of mutual respect and celebration of the genders and the gifting as it is expressed through the genders.

I have invited several of our women to teach classes where men would be involved. Why? First, they are gifted. Second, I want to hear what God has to say through them to me. Third, they are not occupying an office of authority.