

SEXISM

“male and female He created them”

Key question

Are there gender distinctions in the Bible and are there to be gender distinct roles in the church and home today?

Key text

Galatians 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Key Definition

Sexism

Sexism is a preference defined by an irrational fear that is mixed with social and cultural power and is focused on a person’s gender.

Introduction.

1. Is the Biblical teaching on gender roles sexist? How are we to understand the direct and indirect references to gender and ministry in the Bible?
2. Some initial observations on gender roles in ministry and family.
 - For many evangelicals, the reason this issue is so *passionately* debated is not because they do not like women as leaders but because of the view of Scripture (method of interpretation) that is associated with the egalitarian position (men and women equality requires access to all roles in ministry for women). **“Women in the role of Church elders” is not “a major” while “how we view Scripture” is a major issue.**

The issue is *not about gender roles* but about hermeneutics. Many who hold the complementarian position (men and women are equal but have distinct and complementary roles in family and church) would welcome a woman as president of the USA or chairman of the board in their business and see good “common sense” reasons for women as elders in

the church. Their concern however, is the teaching of Scripture. **Keep the debate on the real issue.**

- For many evangelicals, the reason this issue is so *passionately* debated is not because they do not like women as leaders but because of the view of Scripture (method of interpretation) that is associated with the egalitarian position (men and women equality requires access to all roles in ministry for women). **“Women in the role of Church elders” is not “a major” while “how we view Scripture” is a major issue.**
 - The confusion is not over what the Scripture teaches so much as how that teaching seems inconsistent with core values of *popular culture*. **“Gender roles in ministry” has not been a major issue of debated until recently and then only in progressive Western culture.**
 - The weight of the *historical and cross-cultural* understanding of Biblical teaching on this subject is on the side of the complementarian position. **The burden of proof is with the egalitarian position.**
 - The *whole of the Scriptural data* is easier to explain from the perspective of the complementarian position than the egalitarian side. **There are no prescriptive texts in support of the egalitarian position like there are for the complementarian position.**
 - The *hermeneutical methods* used to support the egalitarian position would not be tolerated in addressing other issues. **Traditional sexual ethics can be seriously challenged using the same types of arguments.**
 - The key text is *I Tim.2:11-15*. If this text can be explained so as to not support the complementarian position, the issue is not decided (there are other texts that must also be explained) but the biggest single obstacle is overcome. **Egalitarian explanations of this text must draw upon a hypothetical cultural context for which there is no hard evidence.**
3. I sense that the key to a correct understanding of gender roles lies in the challenge of **“loneliness”** (*Gen.2:18 “It is not good for man to be alone.”*)
- a. **Loneliness – the challenge of material / mortality**
 1. C.S. Lewis described hell as “isolation”. Satan’s game is to isolate us from God and each other.
 2. Marriage roles are best understood by viewing them as addressing loneliness in both husband and wife.
 - b. **How does the wife address loneliness in the life of her husband?**
 1. She becomes his champion – believing in him, subjecting herself to his headship, encouraging him, etc. when others challenge his **significance**.
 2. When the husband loses confidence in his God given role as the image bearer of the self-sacrificing Christ in the marriage relationship, the wife stands by him as his strength and trusting supporter.
 3. The greatest gift a wife can give her husband is to offer her heart in support of him, even when it involves self-sacrifice. The greatest insult she can give her husband is to withhold her heart from him.
 - c. **How does the husband address loneliness in the life of his wife?**
 1. He becomes her source of **security** – understanding her, protecting her, honoring her, providing for her, etc.
 2. When the husband invests his life in the welfare of his wife, he is investing in the welfare of his own soul’s significance as well as the significance of the marriage.

3. The greatest insult a husband can give to his wife is to abandon her physically and emotionally. The greatest gift he can give her is to honor her vulnerability (weakness) with protection and nurturing.
- d. **Note that Paul speaks of gender roles as reflecting Christ's relationship with his bride, the church. (Eph.5:32)**
 1. "Loneliness" is a major issue in the Gospel story.
 2. The incarnation introduces Jesus as "Immanuel" (God with us) Matt.1:23.
 3. Among the final words that Jesus leaves with his disciples are the promise that he will be with them always, even to the end of the age (Matt.28:29) and that he will not leave them as orphans (alone) but will indwell them through his Spirit (John 14:16-18).
 4. The Body of Christ unites God's people in intimate communion so that they are not alone (I Cor.12:12-26).
4. We must understand key forces that shape modern Western societies if we are to understand the tensions surrounding gender roles in our culture.
 - a. **Secularism**
 1. **Absolute autonomy** - No one has the right to tell me what I must or must not do with my life.
 2. **Radical relativity** - We are all in the process of evolutionary change. Every age and culture must define its own patterns and roles.
 3. **Comprehensive contingency** - Everything is to be understood in terms of its natural cultural context.
 4. **Total temporality** - All hopes are to be realized in this life.
 - b. **A sense of justice based upon a DEMOCRATIC IDEAL:**
 1. The individual is subject to nothing outside the "self" or the "community."
 2. Personal self-worth is related to power, position, & freedom of choice.
 3. Equal distribution of resources & opportunities is a right.
 4. Roles are to be based upon personal achievement not authoritative decree.
 - c. **A sense of economic PRAGMATISM based upon:**
 1. The productivity of the ministry governs the process of the ministry.
 2. "If it works, it must be good or at least accepted"
5. **The woman's movement has both influenced the church and been challenged by the church.**
 - a. **SCIENCE OR POLITICS?**
 1. The scientific data that we have on the nature vs. nurture debate is too often selectively used to serve the prevailing political appetite.
 2. The anthropological and historical information we have tends to be used in a similarly selective fashion.
 - b. **EXEGESIS OR ISOGESIS?**
 1. The traditional interpretation of the Biblical text on this issue has not been seriously challenged until the woman's movement (in modern technological societies) brought its influence to the church.
 2. If there is a burden of proof, it certainly must rest with those who are challenging the traditional position.

3. Many of the creative “exegetical” tactics used to challenge the traditional position would never be tolerated in other areas of Scripture investigation (ie. the deity of Jesus, sexual morality).
- c. **FREEDOM OR REBELLION?**
 1. A large part of the motive behind the egalitarian position looks not like a desire to submit to God’s plan for ministry but to rebel against restraints that don’t fit modernity.
 2. It is important to make a distinction between two types of feminism - **General feminism** (women have a right to fair treatment and equal opportunity in trying to realize their aspirations.), **Gender feminism** (All social reality is to be viewed in terms of the “sex-gender system” of male-dominance where women are victims.)
- d. **SERVANTHOOD OR SELFISHNESS?**
 1. Christian feminists correctly emphasize servant leadership but by their insistence on having position in the church they seem to contradict themselves.
 2. Leadership in the church is to take the posture of humility and self sacrifice for the welfare of others but it also involves authority. I Tim.3:4-5, 5:17-19, I Pet.5:5
6. **The church must acknowledge the fact that gender-based roles, has led to inexcusable abuse in some instances.**
 - a. The church has sometimes failed to recognize the destructive impact of sin on God’s design.
 - b. God does not commission men to PUT women in subjection and when men take such a posture they run the risk of violating their call to sacrificially love.
 - c. Biblically prescribed roles have often led both men and women to wrongly conclude that women were in some sense inferior to men in ability, intelligence, character, & worth.
 - d. Where Scripture has not been clear, there have been those who have insisted that their personal interpretation and application be accepted without debate or question.
 - e. A very conservative “literalistic” interpretation without respect for historical - cultural context has led to some insensitive applications.
 - f. The apocryphal books of the Old Testament make a number of despairing comments about women that have led some Christian traditions to view women as inferior.
 1. *"The birth of a daughter is a loss" (Ecclesiasticus 22:3).*
 2. *"A man who educates his son will be the envy of his enemy." (Ecclesiasticus 30:3)*
 3. *"Your daughter is headstrong? Keep a sharp look-out that she does not make you the laughing stock of your enemies, the talk of the town, the object of common gossip, and put you to public shame" (Ecclesiasticus 42:11).*
 4. *"Keep a headstrong daughter under firm control, or she will abuse any indulgence she receives. Keep a strict watch on her shameless eye, do not be surprised if she disgraces you" (Ecclesiasticus 26:10-11).*
7. **When a long-standing interpretation is challenged, the burden of proof rests with the challengers.**
 - a. There is little question that the traditional (complementarian) view of gender and ministry has been the accepted interpretation up until modern times. It is also safe to

say that the complementarian view still does represent the perspective of the world wide Christian community (outside the Western civilization).

- b. This does not mean that it is the correct view. History is important but not determinative. We are not the first generation to wrestle with this issue nor can we claim that we are the generation that stands in the best position to be objective.
- c. Given the long-standing status of the complementarian view, the burden of proof for a change rests with its egalitarian proponents.

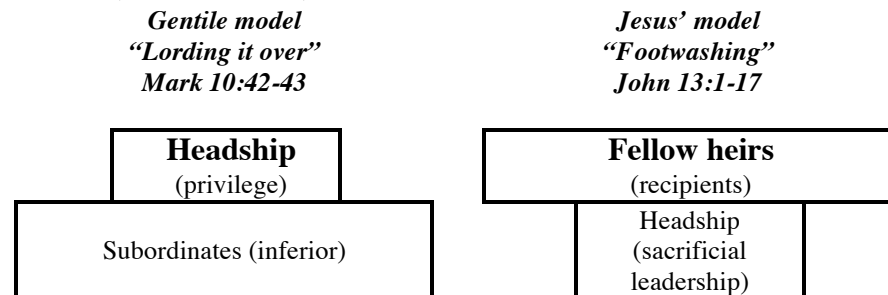
A. Paul's teaching on gender roles in marriage seems to reflect a gender role distinction without subordination of worth.

1. Basic principle #1 - **"EQUALITY"** (*Gal.3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*).
 - a. This principle is an affirmation of Gen.1:27 "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."
 - b. The term **"joint-heirs"** is used in **I Peter 3:7** to express the same idea.
 - c. In **Gal.3:28** Paul clearly affirms the unity & equality of male and female.
 1. This is a statement that seems to be directed at a common Pharisaic prayer - "Thank you God for not creating me a gentile, a slave, or a woman."
 2. This text is not speaking of homogeneous roles because:
 - a) The context in Gal. 3 is dealing with "justification" not "responsibility in ministry."
 - b) The phrase "you are all one" does not mean "you are all equal (in function or role)" Examples are found in I Cor.3:8, Rom.12:5, Jn.10:30, Mk.10:8, etc.
 - c) The parallel text (Col.3:11-19) which speaks of both equality of spiritual standing and distinctiveness in male/female roles indicates that the two concepts were not inconsistent in the mind of God.
2. Basic principle #2 - **"HEADSHIP"** (*I Cor.11:3 "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."*).
 - a. **This principle is an affirmation of Genesis 2:18-25** where woman is created for man.
 - 1) Genesis 2 draws our attention (not to the significance of mankind in God's creation) but rather to the dynamics of the relationship between man and his environment including woman.
 - 2) Here we see **UNIQUENESS** (distinctives) of man and woman.
 - a) The **LONGINGS** of men and women are distinct.
 - b) Hierarchy of order:
 - The example and teaching of Jesus and the Apostles seems to support this understanding.
 - Many current scientific studies also suggest some important distinctives between man and woman that help explain the patriarchal ordering of societies.
 - 3) Needless to say, this teaching has met with considerable **RESISTANCE** not only in the world but also (currently) in the church.
 - a) Secular values--worth linked to **POWER** and **AUTHORITY**. (The traditional view becomes a supreme put-down for women.)

- b) Sin has distorted these distinctives so as to EXPLOIT women as we shall see below.
- b. The Role of Eve in the Fall - Gen.3:**
- 1) The text seems to make a point of Eve's being the object of the serpent's deception (see II Corinthians 11:3), even though Adam is ultimately held responsible (Genesis 3:9-11, Romans 5:12).
 - 2) In **I Timothy 2:8-15**, Paul's teaching on woman's role in the church is linked to her role in the Fall.
 - 3) Distinctions (hierarchy) did not originate with "the fall" but tension and wrong values did.
 - a) The Hebrew word MASHAL translated "rule" is commonly used for cases of domination or control in a negative sense (see Genesis 4:7, Luke 22:24). This is not a reiteration of male headship, which is suggested in Genesis 2, but it is a new and oppressive dimension to that headship.
 - b) The FALL brought:
 1. Selfish abuses of God's order.
 2. Insecurity and the demanding of rights.
 3. Guilt and blindness to truth.
- c. Christ - The New Adam**
- 1) Jesus reversed what Adam did (Romans 5:17-18).
 - 2) Jesus' reversal leads to a new humanity (Eph.3:14-16, I Cor.15:47-49, Eph.4:22-23).
 - 3) There are three important implications growing out of Christ's work:
 - a) All Christian teaching on male-female roles presuppose a new creation and a new nature reversing the effects of the Fall.
 - b) The goal of Christ's work is to establish a "community" and a "brotherhood."
 - c) Jesus seems to return to the "pre-fall" pattern of Genesis 1-2 and abolishes the distortions of the "fall" (Genesis 3). Note the following examples.
 1. The New Testament documents were written by men only.
 2. Women were not recognized as teachers by Jesus, nor were they commissioned with special authority as were the 12 apostles.
 3. The "70" in Luke 10 who were sent out to preach were men.
 4. The Lord's Supper and the Great Commission were given to men (Mark 16:14-20).
- d. "HEAD"** (κεφαλή KEPHALE) is used, in the case of living beings, to denote superior rank. **Note** The word often implies "authority" as in **Eph.5:22-24** where Paul relates the wife's subjection to the husband's headship. In **Col.1:18** Paul links Christ's "first born from the dead" status with headship and supremacy. "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."
- 1) **ILLUSTRATION: Eph.5:21-32** In this passage Paul is drawing attention to the relationship between Christ and the church vs.32. He has in mind the well known teaching concerning the Lordship of Christ over all creation including the church (Col.1:15-23) and the subjection of the church to Christ. He is arguing that marriage is designed to illustrate this important relationship. It is husband and wife together that bear the image of God. He exhorts Christians to live out this drama in their

relationships and thus bear God's image through their union. While we are concerned about our rights God is concerned about our opportunity as image bearers. While we are concerned about our welfare because of abuses God is concerned about our neglect of our calling to mirror God's character.

- 2) **ILLUSTRATION: I Cor.11:3** *"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and that man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."* The relationship of unity subordination that exists between Christ and God the Father is a picture of "headship". While Christ is always subject to God the Father, He is not inferior to the Father. The idea of mutual subordination seems inappropriate in describing the relationship between Christ and the Father. The Father is never pictured as subject to Christ.
- 3) Jesus' view of leadership stands in contrast to the assumptions of His day.
Matt.20:20-28, Mk.10:35-45, Jn.13:1-17



- 4) Headship for the husband means *"loving leadership"*.
- a) **"LOVE"** (agape) (Eph. 5:25-29).
 - (1) As Christ did--sacrificially.
 - (2) As their own bodies--nourishing (encouraging) and cherishing (valuing).
 - b) **"Do not be EMBITTERED against"** (Col. 3:19).
 - c) **"Live within an UNDERSTANDING way"** (I Peter 3:7).
 - d) **"Grant HONOR"** (I Peter 3:7).
- 5) Headship for the wife means *"respectful submission"*.
- a) **"Be SUBJECT to"** (Eph. 5:22-24).
 - (1) As to the Lord.
 - (2) As the Church is to Christ.
 - (3) As is fitting in the Lord (Col. 3:18).
 - b) **"Be SUBMISSIVE to"** (I Peter 3:1-6).
 - (1) Your own husband.
 - (2) Even when they are disobedient to the Word.
 - (3) Without fear (Note four basic fears of a wife)
 - (a) Fear of what he might ask me to do.
 - (b) Fear that he will fail.
 - (c) Fear of his irresponsibility.
 - (d) Fear of God's will.
 - c) **"Be clothed with a GENTLE AND QUIET SPIRIT"** (I Peter 3:1-6).
 - (1) This is not a personality type but a faith attitude.

(2) This is the confidence that God will use even the mistakes of those in authority over us to achieve His ultimate will.

- e. The meaning of head covering
1. The key text is I Cor.11:2-16
 2. This text makes it very clear that gender distinctives are to be emphasized and recognized not marginalized or ignored.
 3. Key questions
 - a. Were the women in question, wives or all believing women?
 - b. Was the covering a veil (an early church tradition), authority (vs.10) or long hair?
 - c. What is the purpose of the covering?
 1. It was the culture of Paul's day (10:32). Palestinian Jewish women were veiled in public and in worship while men did not cover their heads in worship until the 4th century. Greco-Roman women were not veiled in public as a rule.
 2. It has to do with the order of creation – vs.7-11
 3. It is a matter of common sense – vs.13-15
 4. It was the common practice – vs.16
 - d. When was the covering appropriate – at all worship services, when praying or prophesying in public etc.?
 - e. Head covering was a culturally recognized symbol of (perhaps) a woman's relationship to her husband. This symbol may take different forms in different cultures. Gender roles in ministry and marriage are not symbols but mandates of function in ministry.
 - f. Some have used the following reasons to argue that long hair may be the head covering spoken of in this text.
 1. Vs. 4 has no object and is very nonspecific. In the LXX (Lev.13:45) it refers to loosed hair as a sign of uncleanness in a leper. In Num.5:18 it refers to an adulteress.
 2. Verse 15 could be translated “her long hair is given to her **instead of** a veil”
- f. Restoration of the relationship between male and female rests with:
1. The freedom from guilt and blindness found in Christ.
 2. Recognizing the dynamics of genuine community.
 - Not COMPETITION and demanding of RIGHTS
 - Guilt will affect many attitudes and behaviors--openness, fear, feelings of insecurity, feelings of insignificance.
 - Freedom is a function of brokenness & faith.
 3. Community and Subordination
 - a. Genuine community cannot exist without unity-subordination.
 - b. Much of modern society consciously fosters INDEPENDENCE (as opposed to interdependence) and INDIVIDUALISM (freedom from being told what to do). Equality and subordination are viewed as contradictory and mutually exclusive. If Genesis 1-2 teaches equality (as they do), then modern society concludes they cannot teach subordination. God's design for His community involves unity-subordination on a number of levels and in a number of relationships.

B. Paul's teaching concerning gender and ministry reflects sensitivity to both individual giftedness and creation order.

1. Basic principle #1 - **“WITNESS”** (*Acts 1:8 “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses”*)
2. Basic principle #2 - **“GIFTS”** (*I Cor.12:7 “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”*)

- a. There are two different emphasis with respect to the relationship between personal gifts and official offices in the church.

Charismatic model

Gifts not related to office

Gifts not gender specific

Informal ministry

Low church

Clergy model

Gifts related to office

Gifts linked to ordination

Ordained ministry

High church

- b. The Biblical writers assumed a more charismatic emphasis than did the later church. This means that gifts are freely and often used outside ordained offices.
3. Basic principle #3 - **“MINISTRY”** (*I Cor.12:5 “And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.”*).
 - a. The proper use of spiritual gifts is subject to God's order in ministry.
 - b. The special responsibilities of oversight and doctrinal instruction for the local assembly fall to the men.

- 1) The principle text on this subject is **I Tim.2:11-15**. *“¹¹ Let a woman 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 quite deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵ But {women} shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”*

- a) Vs. 12a is the key passage: *“I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.”*

- b) Vs. 11 & 12b are the antithesis:

- (1) *“Let a woman quietly receive instruction.”* This is the imperative in the text. Women were to receive instruction but not critique or give it in certain contexts.
- (2) *“but to remain quiet.”* The Greek term used here does not mean “do not speak” but rather “maintain a gentle spirit.”

- c) The Greek word αυθεντειν “AUTHENTEIN”, translated *“to exercise authority,”* is used only here in the New Testament and means “to pull rank.” The normal word for “authority” is εξουσια “EXOUSIA”, and is not used here. This would suggest that women are not to avoid any and all roles of authority but rather to maintain “a spirit of submission” in their ministry. The suggestion that this word means “to take charge or usurp authority” is not supported by the way the word was used in the early Christian era outside the Bible.

- d) The Greek word επιτρεπω “EPITREPΩ”, translated *“to permit.”* In the present tense this term would have the force of “I never permit.”

- e) The Greek word διδασκειν “DIDASKEIN”, translated here “to teach,” is the common word for “giving instruction” used in Col. 3:16 of all believers. Paul is probably using it here in the restricted sense of 1) interpreting prophecy or 2) doctrinal instruction before the local assembly, that is, to take the role of “the teacher or elder.”

NOTE: In Judaism and the Greco-Roman world the teacher occupied a unique and highly visible place distinct from the prophet. Women were accepted as prophets but not as teachers. It also must be realized that teaching takes place on several levels: 1) informal mutual instruction among believers, 2) the instruction contained in prophesying, 3) doctrinal instruction, 4) Apostolic instruction. Paul probably has the last two categories in mind.

- f) Paul bases his statement on the order of creation and Eve’s role in the Fall (I Tim.2:13-14).

- g) Six characteristics of a Godly woman from I Tim.2:9-15

1. **Godly women cultivate beauty from the inside out.**

“9 Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discretely, not with braided hair and gold or pearls of costly garments; 10 but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.”

2. **Godly women model the church’s relationship with Christ.**

“11 Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.”

3. **Godly women do not displace male headship.**

“12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.”

4. **Godly women do not feel inferior to men.**

“13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.”

NOTE: The rationale for Paul’s instruction is God’s created ordering of things not culture, ability, giftedness, or spirituality.

5. **Godly women are aware of their vulnerability.**

“14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.”

6. **Godly women bring dignity to the bearing of children.**

“15 But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”

- 2) A parallel passage is found in **I Cor.14:33-38**. “*34 Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. 36 Was it from you that the word of God {first} went forth? Or has it come to you only? 37 If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. 38 But if anyone does not recognize {this}, he is not recognized.*”

- a) Those who understand Paul’s words in this passage as not involving any restriction on women in ministry do so on the following grounds.

1. **THE DEMAND FOR SILENCE IS NOT ABSOLUTE.** The reference to women who prophecy in the I Cor.11 passage refers to a general situation

outside the formal assembly or it is a concession on Paul's part (not his preference).

2. THE TEXTS CONTRADICT ONE ANOTHER. We must choose between - the authentic enlightened Paul of I Cor.11:2-16 and Gal.3:27-28 or the textual gloss in I Cor.14 & I Tim.2.
 3. PAUL IS SPEAKING OF THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN (NOT TO MEN) BUT TO HIS ORDER OF WORSHIP.
 4. PAUL IS REFERRING TO A LOCAL SITUATION ONLY. It has been suggested by some that the real reason for Paul's teaching in this text is that **the women were disorderly (noisy)**. But there is no evidence for this as a problem in the church in any text inside or outside the Bible. There is evidence of wild behavior in pagan religious rites at the time. But this behavior was not limited to women. In other situations where the problem was "disorder", Paul prescribes "order" (11:33-34; 14:27-31) not silence. If the problem was disorder among some women, why would Paul restrict all women?
 5. VS.34-35 IS THE FALSE POSITION OF THE CORINTHIANS THAT PAUL IS REFUTING.
 6. VS.34-35 WERE NOT A PART OF THE ORIGINAL TEXT AND SHOULD THEREFORE BE IGNORED.
 7. It is also claimed by some that Paul is restricting "idol chatter" (the suggested meaning of LALEO in 14:34-35), rather than constructive speech. But we should note that LALEO is the general word for all kinds of speech. The same word is used in vs. 2, 3-6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27-29, 39.
 8. **Paul's instruction that women "keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak" may parallel I Tim.2:12** and refer to "headship" functions within the local assembly. Absolute silence is not mandated here. Note that he prescribes "silence" in a limited sense in I Cor.14:28 "*if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent*".
- b) Married women *only* may be in view here.
1. "submission" vs.34 elsewhere refers only to married women.
 2. "their own husbands" vs.35.
- c) Paul underscores the authority behind this instruction.
- (1) Most commentators link the last part of vs. 33 "as in all the churches of the saints" with vs. 34. This would indicate that Paul's concern is not just for a local situation at Corinth. The fact that he talks about "the churches (plural) in verse 34 underscores the fact that this teaching is not occasional.
 - (2) "As the Law also says" (vs. 34) There is no OT text that is explicitly addressed to this subject but the general pattern of all of Scripture (the Law) is in this direction. Paul appeals to Gen.2 elsewhere and the order of creation as related to gender roles.
 - (3) "Disgraceful" (vs. 35) This suggests that the proscribed behavior is abnormal for the Christian community.
 - (4) "The Lord's commandment" (vs. 37) Again, we are not aware of any specific reference in the gospels that makes this point directly. It could be inferred by Jesus practice - choosing 12 men as disciples for example.

(5) “if any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized.” (vs.38) Paul indicates that recognition of this issue is basic to being respected in the Christian community.

- d) A small group of scholars (Straatman, Fitzer, Barrett, Ruef, Fee, and Payne) feel that I Corinthians 14:34-35 should be excised from the text. This is because many of the Western witnesses have these verses after v. 40, while the rest of the tradition retains them here. There are *no* manuscripts that omit the verses yet some feel that its ambiguous location in differing traditions argues for it’s being a later insertion.
 - e) I Cor.14:33-38 probably refers to the critique of prophetic messages. This function would logically fall to the elders or teachers and Paul instructs women to be silent and not participate in that particular function.
- 3) It is clear that women prophesied (spoke for edification, exhortation, and consolation- I Cor.14:3). I Cor.11:5; Acts 2:17, 21:9 and taught other women - Titus 2:3-5

C. The egalitarian position consists largely of five arguments. I am including responses to these arguments as well.

1. A modern understanding of JUSTICE demands equality of roles between men and women.

- a. If God is just He must also advocate freedom and equality (of roles).
- b. Jesus reversed Adam’s fall (Rom.5:17-18) with its subordination of women (Gen.3).

Response:

Western democratic ideals, while unquestioned in our culture, are not representative of the world generally (80% of the world’s societies do not make these assumptions) nor are these assumptions reflected in God’s dealing with His people.

- 1. God’s choice of Israel.
- 2. God’s choice of the tribe of Levi to constitute the priesthood.
- 3. God’s appointment of the disciples.

2. The attitude of Jesus toward women suggests that they were given ministry authority.

- a. **NOTE:** Women, in Pagan, Greek, and Hebrew culture at the time of Jesus occupied a social position that often rendered them inferior and without public privilege. Jesus’ teaching and actions stand in bold contrast to His culture with respect to many aspects of women’s roles.
- b. He recognized women as co-equal heirs of God’s grace with men.
 - 1. Women were not just an extension of their husbands.
 - 2. Jesus respected their faith. Matt.9:20-22, 15:21-28.
 - 3. He respected their individuality. Lk.12:53, Matt.12:50
 - 4. He taught them. Matt.14:21
 - 5. He used them as illustrations in His teaching. Lk.13:18-21, 15:8-10
- c. He received special ministry from women.
 - 1. They ministered hospitality to Him.
 - 2. They gave money to His support.
 - 3. They prepared His body for burial. Lk.7:36-50, John 12:1-11

- d. He recognized their involvement in ministry.
 1. They bore testimony concerning Him. Lk.13:10-13, John 4:27-30
 2. They were numbered among his followers in Matt.12:46-50; Lk.8:1-3

Response:

- Jesus seems to return to the “pre-fall” pattern of Genesis 1-2 and abolish the distortions of the “fall” (Gen.3). He does not eliminate gender roles just the abuse of them.
1. The New Testament documents were written by men (not women).
 2. Women were not recognized as teachers by Jesus nor were they commissioned with special authority as were the twelve apostles.
 3. The “70” in Luke 10 who were sent out to preach were men.
 4. The Lord’s Supper and the great commission were given to men. Mark 16:14-20
 5. The disciples in Luke 8:1-3 are distinguished from “some women.”
3. **The fact that women are mentioned as having significant ministry in the early church bears witness to their authority in ministry.**
 - a. PROPHECY:
 1. **Acts 21:9** - Philip “*had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.*”
 2. **I Cor.11:5** - “*Any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her head.*”
 3. **Acts 1:17-18** - “*Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.*”
 - b. TEACHING:
 1. **Acts 18:24-28** - Priscilla and Aquila teach Apollos
 2. **Titus 2:3** - “*They are to teach what is good and train the younger women*”
 3. **II Tim.1:5** - Timothy is taught by his mother.
 - c. CHARITABLE SERVICE:
 1. **Acts 9:36** - Tobitha - “*was full of good works and acts of charity.*”
 2. **I Tim.5:3-16** - The role of widows (vs. 10).
 - d. MISSIONARY WORK:
 1. **Rom.16:1-7,12** - Phoebe, Prisca, etc.
 2. **Phil. 4:2-3** - Eudodia and Syntyche
 - e. DEACONESS (as distinct from deacon or elder)
 1. **I Tim.3:8-13**
 2. **Rom.16:1-2** - “*Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae.*”
 3. From middle of the Third Century on, we have extra Biblical references to deaconesses as those who care for other women.
 4. **Acts 6:2-6** - If this text is to be taken as a prototype of the diaconate, it limited the members to males (aner). This does not affect the deaconess office in that it was distinct from the office of deacon in the Third Century.
 - f. APOSTLES AND ELDERS
 1. Two texts are used by some to suggest that women were elders in the Early Church:
 2. **Rom.16:7** - “*. . . Junias . . . outstanding among the apostles.*”

3. **I Tim.5:2** - “*older women*” - (PRESBYTERAS) - The word for elder in Greek can also mean older man, so with the word for older woman.
 4. Some of the people who had churches meeting in their homes were women (Rom.16:5; I Cor.16:9).
- g. THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH
1. God has honored the preaching of women.
 2. Valuable resources are wasted if women are not ordained as elders.

Response:

1. Biblical leadership authority:
 - a. It is often ascribed (not achieved) on the basis of seemingly strange (to Western values) criteria. For example, the Levites alone were to be priests.
 - b. It does not “lord it over” others but takes the posture of a self-sacrificing servant.
 - c. It is not to be confused with any particular spiritual gift. The gift of teaching does not necessarily lead to being an elder.
 - d. It must meet certain character qualifications. Note that “a sense of call to be a leader” is not mentioned as a qualification.
2. What was the role of the prophet in the New Testament church? It does not seem to coincide with elder or bishop or deacon. It is best understood as a charismatic gift given to both men and women for use inside and outside church meetings. It would be unusual for the early Christians to equate prophecy with teaching in the formal church meeting. Complementarians would support women as prophets and not sense that such a ministry violated the proscriptions in Timothy and Corinthians.
3. There are many examples of women ministering in the N.T. but very few if any of women serving as elders, teachers, or rulers in the church. The four examples that are most often presented are at best dubious.
 - a. **Acts 18:26** “*But when **Priscilla** and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*” Priscilla’s role in teaching Apollos is seen by some as an example of a woman in a teaching position. But she is never sighted apart from Aquila (her husband) and does not appear to occupy a position of leadership or teacher in a congregation. Their role seemed to be itinerant. Her part in the ministry to Apollos is not very clear.
 - b. **Rom.16:1-2** “*I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, who is a **servant** (deaconess) of the church which is at Cenchrea; --- she herself has also been a **helper** of many, and of myself as well*” This woman apparently served as an official deaconess in the church. The deacons role is not one of teaching authority but of assistance to the elders. She is described as a “*helper*” (Greek **prostatiß** prostatis) a rare word that means “*patroness*” or “*protectress*”. It is a term of dignity but does not give us any definitive grounds for assuming that Phoebe was an elder in the church. For example, would we be willing to see her as an elder over Paul? The text would suggest that, if she were indeed an elder.
 - c. **Rom.16:7** “*Greet Andronicus and **Junias**, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*” Some have suggested that Junias is a women (Junia is a possible translation) and that this verse puts her “*among the apostles.*” “*Among the apostles*” could mean that Junias was

one of the apostles or it could just as easily mean - the apostles felt that these folks were outstanding.

- d. **II Jn.1** “*The elder to the chosen lady and her children*” This woman is probably responsible for the conversion of a group of people. The claim that she is an elder or bishop of a house church is pure conjecture. There is no compelling evidence of that here.
4. **Specific texts seem to support the full ministry of women with men.**
- Gal.3:28** (there is no gender distinction in Christ)
 - Col.3:16** (all believers are to teach)
 - I Cor.14:1-3** (all are to seek after prophesy)
 - I Pet.2:5-9** (the priesthood of all believers)
 - Eph.5:21** (mutual submission)

Response:

Responses to these texts:

- Gal.3:28** is speaking of “justification” not roles as the parallel in Col.3:10-25 indicates.
 - Col.3:16** speaks of the general teaching, encouragement & exhortation that is a part of natural fellowship. This is not the same as the elder’s function.
 - I Cor.14:1-3** speaks of prophesy which was practiced by both men and women in Greek and Hebrew culture. This is distinct from the authoritative teaching - ruling function of the elder.
 - I Pet.2:5-9** in speaking of the priesthood of all believers implies our direct and personal access to God through Christ. There are no priests in the New Covenant community that intercede for the congregation. This text says nothing about clergy roles.
 - Eph.5:21** which advocates mutual submission does not erase the roles specified in vs.22-33. as seen in the application to children / parents (6:1-4) and slaves / masters (6:5-9).
5. **The texts that seem to support the traditional argument can be explained.**
- Some modern by-passes to the problem texts:**

NOTE: Not all who argue against the traditional position adopt these attitudes. These attitudes represent the kinds of presuppositions used by a variety of opponents to the traditional position.

 - The teaching is to be understood in the **context of particular First Century cultural problems** that are no longer present. Passages such as I Timothy 2 and I Cor.12 are best understood as occasional in nature and not directly applicable to our present situation.
 - Scripture must be in accord with **a modern democratic view of what is ethical**, or we will have to reject it.
 - We can **pick out what is truly important** about Scripture and judge the rest in terms of what is (in our view) essential.
 - Modern scholars understand the O.T. Scripture better** than the apostles did.
 - The **Apostles did not always interpret** (the Gospel) **correctly**.
 - The **arguments in Scripture are not sufficiently cogent** for us to accept them.

7. **We can dismiss certain elements of the Scriptural teaching when they seem to originate in an outside influence**--such as rabbinic influence - rather than the real Christian message.
 8. We are trying to be **led by the Spirit**, and the Spirit has not led us to adopt the kind of position that Scripture seems to teach.
 9. There are **contradictions in Scripture** or, at least, some teachings in Scripture are so much at variance with one another that we cannot hold both with intellectual integrity. Hence, we can hold only to some of the Scriptures.
 10. The passages that seem to suggest a gender distinction in ministry roles come from **texts that were probably not inspired** but were added to the canon or to canonical books by those who had a bias against women. This is a part of another question concerning the authorship of I Timothy and I Cor.14:33-38.
- b. **Some suggested cultural explanations:**
1. Explanations that see the teaching as aimed at **situations in the early Church**:
 - a. To **avoid ridicule** from the **Greeks** (I Cor.11), or **Jews** (I Cor.14; I Tim.2)
 - b. To restrict women in their speech in open meetings where their freedom might **offend newcomers** (I Cor.14).
 - c. To **enhance evangelism** by doing things in a way more acceptable.(I Cor.11,14).
 - d. To keep Christian women from **looking like prostitutes** (I Cor.11).
 - e. To insure that Christian **women fit in with the customs** of the day (I Cor.11,14).
 - f. To enable Christian women to **win their non-Christian husbands** (I Pet.3).
 - g. To handle a situation in which the women were talking too much and **causing a disturbance** (I Cor.14).
 - h. To correct a situation in which the **women seated on one side of the assembly** were calling out questions to their husbands on the other (I Cor.14).
 - i. To prevent women from **relapsing into paganism** (I Cor.11,14; I Tim.2).
 2. Explanations that see the teaching as designed to deal with the **cultural situation of the ancient world** in respect to women:
 - a. To keep women from speaking or teaching because they are **not sufficiently educated** (I Cor.14; I Tim.2).
 - b. To produce **conformity to the social order** of the time (Col.3).
 - c. To counter the **Gnostic problem** of women in disruptive roles following the lead of the Greek goddess Artemis who took no second place to a male god. (I Tim.2).

Response:

The fact is that none of the above circumstances are actually stated in the text as the reasons for the teaching. **Note the rationale given in the text for the teaching.**

1. An appeal to authority (Christ, Apostles, universal practice of the churches) suggests that this teaching is not occasional but to be applied broadly.
 - a. The presence of the angels (I Cor.11:10).
 - b. The universal practice of the church (I Cor.11:2,16; 14:33,36).
 - c. The law's example (I Cor.14:37).
 - d. The command of the Lord (I Cor.14:37).
 - e. The authority of the apostles (I Cor.14:3; I Tim.2:12).

2. An appeal to revealed truth showing God's purpose & intentions suggests that this teaching is not originating in ancient culture.
 - a. The order of headship (God, Christ, the man, the woman) (I Cor.11:3).
 - b. Christ as model of both head and subordinate (I Cor.11:3).
 - c. Man as the image and glory of God, woman as the glory of man; woman made from and for man (I Cor.11:7-9).
 - d. Man born from woman (I Cor.11:11-12).
 - e. The comparison with hair (I Cor.11:5-6,14-15).
 - f. Adam was formed first (I Tim.2:13).
 3. It has been suggested that the reason Jesus chose men and not women as Apostles is because only men would be respected in bearing witness to the Gospel. But women were often successful in their witness.
 - a. In John 4 a Samaritan woman went to the men of the city (vs.28) and witnessed to the wisdom of Jesus with the result that the men came to see Jesus (vs.30).
 - b. Women were the first to bear witness to the resurrection.
 4. If the true rationale for restrictions in ministry was incompetence, false teaching, and or cult influence, we would expect Paul to make that (not gender) the issue.
 - a. The fact that Paul makes gender the issue suggests that he is in deed a sexist if indeed the issue is not gender.
 - b. Are we to assume that the false teacher corrupted all women and only women? Even if that were the case, would it not be sexist to use gender as the issue. Many men were illiterate and uneducated, as well as the women, and thus just as likely to ask disruptive questions and be just as easily seduced by heresy. In the Epistles it is only the men who are ever explicitly said to teach heresy.
 5. Of course, the egalitarian interpretation is possible, the problem is that it does not strike many people, either scholarly or untutored, as plausible.
- c. **Concluding remarks:**
1. The liberation of both men and women is important. The question is: from what are we to be liberated? The Scripture indicates that our bondage may be to the world's lies about the nature of our security and significance being tied to our social / political power or position. Jesus criticized the way the rulers of this world understood power – as tied to social position (not love). Paul shunned the power values of this world in order to know Christ. Our true power is seen in our freedom to love, serve, and sacrifice as Christ did.
 2. We must (as much as possible) critically screen ourselves of our cultural biases (be they traditional or contemporary) in our exegesis.
 3. We must recognize that modern ideas of "equality," "social justice," and "human rights," though they be unarguable imperatives in our modern age, may in the end prove to be pseudo-Christian and provincially Western in their definition. Subordination does not necessarily mean inferiority in God's kingdom.
 4. We must recognize that a willingness to accept and apply the word of God no matter how contrary it may appear to our culture's mores is central to discipleship.
 5. We should assume that the teaching of the apostles is internally consistent and in harmony with the true revelation of the Old Testament and Gospels. When there

appears to be tension between various themes and truths we should seek to harmonize the ideas.

- D. **The “Redemptive-movement hermeneutic”** William J. Webb, in *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* suggests that the Bible provides a critique of ancient culture, that is not the final expression of God’s ethic, but the beginning of a development of various ethical trajectories that are to be developed by subsequent generations of God’s people under the leading of His Spirit.
1. Webb suggests that the issues of slavery, gender roles, and homosexuality provide good case studies for this progressive ethic.
 - a. Ancient culture embraced slavery, prescribed gender roles, and disrespected homosexuality.
 - b. The Bible softened the cultural view of slavery, and modified gender roles, while continuing to disrespect homosexuality.
 - c. This trajectory, if followed, would suggest that eventually God’s people would reject slavery altogether along with gender roles while continuing to disrespect homosexuality.
 - d. It is assumed that the Christian community has followed this hermeneutic with respect to slavery and homosexuality but has not respected or followed it with respect to gender roles. **Webb argues for the application of this principle to gender roles as well.**
 2. If we were to apply this principle to some other issues we might be led to some interesting conclusions.
 - a. Celibacy is the logical extension of Paul’s encouragement to focus on the things of the Kingdom (I Cor.7).
 - b. Socialism is the logical extension of communal life in the early church.
 - c. The Roman Catholic Church’s authority in the formation of doctrine is a logical extension of Apostolic authority.
 - d. Premarital sex is an extension of advancements in birth control and modern medicine.
 - e. Homosexual activity is an extension of modern understandings of human genetic science. (Webb believes that the Scripture would not support this example but gay activists would strongly disagree.)
 3. Wayne Grudem (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Vol.47, No.2 pp 299-346*) offers the following critique of Webb’s hermeneutic.
 - The moral authority of the entire NT is nullified in that it is simply a primitive pointer to an unspoken future more mature ethic.
 - A distinction between the Old Covenant system and the New Covenant system (in Christ) is ignored by Webb. He lumps the whole Biblical story together as if it represented a consistent ethic with no progressive development.
 - Webb treats Gen.2-3 as unhistorical in that it suggests gender roles prior to the Fall of Adam and the corruption of culture.
 - Webb fails to distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive texts as he gathers evidence to support his thesis that there are some obvious Biblical mandates that no one today would consider binding.
 - Webb repeatedly assumes unlikely interpretations of Scripture in order to present a Bible that is so clearly wrong that it is impossible to believe and obey today.

- Webb creates an overly complex system of interpretation that will require experts in ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman culture to work.
- Webb's system is overly liable to subjective influence and therefore is indeterminate and will lead to significant misuse.

Suggested reading

A book entitled *Two Views of Woman in Ministry* by Beck & Blomberg, Zondervan Press is one of many good treatments of both sides of this issue.

Wayne Grudem's book, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* is a recent (2004) publication and a very comprehensive defense of the complementarian view where he answers over 100 questions that are raised by the egalitarian advocates.

Gilbert Bilezikian's book, *Beyond Sex Roles* is a good presentation of the egalitarian view. It was Eternity's book of the Year in 1986.