

1 Timothy 2:8-3:7

Women in the Kingdom: Complementarianism

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / April 24th, 2022

Today in our Women in the Kingdom series, we're diving into the text so many go to when deciding the role of women in the church. 1 Timothy 2:12 says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man..." We look at that verse, and we equate teaching with preaching and holding authority with being an elder. That is one way to interpret the text, and it's called complementarianism.

For the next three weeks, including today, we're going to examine this position and two other perspectives, egalitarianism and a hybrid view. Andy gave us a great chart defining the differences that I want to review and expand on today.

	Complementarianism	Egalitarianism	Hybrid
Value	Believes men and women are of equal dignity and worth.	Believes men and women are of equal dignity and worth.	Believes men and women are of equal dignity and worth.
Church	Believes men and women have distinct roles in church. (1 Timothy 2:8-3:7)	Believes men and women have interchangeable roles in church. (Galatians 3:28)	Believes men and women have interchangeable roles in church. (1 Peter 3:1-7)
Home	Believes men and women have distinct roles in the home. (Ephesians 5:21-33)	Believes men's and women's roles are interchangeable in home. (Galatians 3:28)	Believes husbands' and wives' roles are distinct in the home. (Ephesians 5:21-33)
Creation	Believes gender distinctions are a result of Creation and Christ's redemption as a return to those distinctions.	Believes gender distinctions are a result of the Fall and Christ's redemption as removing those distinctions.	Believes marital distinctions are a result of Creation and Christ's redemption removes distinctions in church body.

So today, we're looking at 1 Timothy 2:8-3:7. Next week we're coming back to this text but also looking at Galatians 3:28 and Egalitarianism. And the third week, we're doing the same thing but also going to 1 Peter 3:1-7 and looking at a hybrid view of women in the church and home. But first, I want to say this:

How we believe matters.

As typical evangelical Christians, we like to jump right to our statement of faith, directly to our doctrine and beliefs. What we believe matters! But it also matters how we believe. God cares about our doctrine, but also our posture. This is especially important with this issue because...

A. This is a second-tier issue.

This is not a primary doctrine of the church. In other words, it's not the protein of our faith. It's not equal to what we believe about the Trinity, or Jesus, or salvation from sin. Those doctrines, which you can find in our Articles of Faith, are so essential; if you don't believe them, your salvation is at stake. But that doesn't mean this isn't an important topic. It's not as frivolous as your favorite ice cream flavor. It matters, yet good

Christians and pastors may disagree. So, as we talk through these three views today, let's hold our positions with a loose grip. *This is a second-tier issue.*

B. Let's open up space for grace and humility.

One way I could address this topic is to just tell you one position, the one I hold and tell you why it's correct. But instead of doing that, I want to show you how all three interpretations are biblical, have strengths and weaknesses, and ultimately encourage us to hold our positions with grace and humility. It's my prayer that the complementarians would follow their convictions but also open up room for others to follow their biblical convictions. So honestly, I am probably going to critique complementarianism a bit harder than the other positions, but that's because it's the one most of us are probably the most comfortable with and have held the longest. But I still want to do so out of love and respect. I need grace and humility. Let's go:

Complementarian – Male-Only Teaching & Leadership

Complementarians believe God made men and women equal in value and dignity and worth, but different in their gender roles, different in what God has called each to do. They complement one another with their different roles. Our text, 1 Timothy 2:8-3:7, is the foundational passage complementarians go to when explaining why women cannot be allowed to preach, teach, or be elders in the local church.

Complementarians generally argue that it is not that hard to interpret 1 Timothy 2:8-14 (notice I didn't say verse 15 because pretty much everyone struggles with that verse). Here's their **basic understanding**:

A. Paul is explaining how men and women should behave in the church. (v8-10)

Men need to lift up their hands in worship and stop fighting because apparently, there was fighting in this church. I think it might also be a call for guys to bring their hearts to worship. And women are supposed to dress modestly, be quiet and do good deeds.

B. Paul exerts his apostolic authority to permanently prohibit women from teaching, preaching, or holding the office of elder/pastor in the local church. (v11-12)

When Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet," Paul is exerting his God-given apostolic authority to make a lasting prohibition that still applies today. Since the very next chapter is about elders and deacons, Paul seems to be limiting who can fill the elder role.

C. Paul roots his argument in the creation order prior to the fall. (v13-14)

Paul references Adam coming first, then Eve, because that event happened pre-fall. So it's a mandate for all times and places. Some churches understand this to mean women should never preach, pastor, or serve as elders, while other more soft-complementarian churches will permit a woman to preach under the spiritual umbrella of the male elders, as long as they do not set any new doctrines or teaching. The complementarian position has **several strengths**:

a) It is easy to understand, and it makes sense of the text.

It seems to fit the puzzle that is this scripture passage.

b) It prioritizes the plain-reading of scripture and obeys it despite cultural pressures.

I respect anyone who holds this position because they believe it's what the Bible teaches. It's a difficult position to hold in our culture. One of *The Gospel Coalition's* critiques of the other position, egalitarianism, is that it seems to loosen its hold on scripture, which allows for other loosening to occur. For example, if we let women preach, won't we use that same interpretive grid to affirm same-sex relationships in the church?

We have seen all the way back in Genesis through the New Testament that God affirms male and female intimate relationships. That ethic remains consistent throughout scripture. I think a better comparison for biblical interpretation is how we approach slavery. While the Bible permits slavery, it also lays the groundwork to abolish it, allowing for greater freedom. But, I have some **questions**:

a. Does it fully address the other examples of women teachers and leaders in scripture?

I'm thinking of Deborah (Judges 4–5). I once heard a fellow pastor identify her as an anomaly. Nowhere does the scripture present Deborah as an anomaly or God's second choice because men didn't do their part. This woman spoke scripture and was the highest religious and court authority in the land. She taught and held authority over men, and she was a married woman. The Bible does not say her filling these roles was un-submissive to her husband. Or how about the prophet Huldah, a female prophet that King Josiah consulted for a word from the Lord when male prophets—Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Nahum, and Jeremiah—were available (2 Chronicles 34:14-33)?

b. Does it acknowledge that job descriptions at that time were androcentric (male-focused) even when the jobs weren't?

This matters because the job description in 1 Timothy 3 for elders is male-only or androcentric (focused on men). It says:

1 Timothy 3:2

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife... (NIV)

God intends marriage to be between a man and a woman. Then, to be an elder, you must be a man. But the job description for deacons is also androcentric (male-focused). The ESV says:

1 Timothy 3:11

Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. (ESV)

Elsewhere, we have an example of a New Testament Deacon who is a woman, Phoebe, in Romans 16:1-2. I've even heard a committed complementarian, Dr. Tom Schreiner, say he thinks Phoebe is a Deacon of the church. One of our previous elders also made a compelling case for why women can serve as Deacons. In the Old Testament, we find a **job description for prophets**:

Numbers 12:6

And he said, "Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the Lord make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. (ESV)

The job description is in the male gender, but it is not limited to the male gender. Miriam serves alongside Moses and Aaron as a prophet and leader of the Israelites:

Exodus 15:20

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. (NIV)

Job descriptions in the ancient near-east were male-centered, but that didn't disqualify women. I think "husband of one wife" may be about marital faithfulness, not gender.

c. Does it fully address the possibility that Paul's prohibition might be contextual?

In other words, there's a very real possibility that Paul's prohibition might be limited to a specific time and place among these particular people. How do we know this is a possibility? Because most complementarians believe that a very similar Bible passage's plain application is limited to a specific time and place.

1 Corinthians 11:4–5 (NIV)

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved.

I grew up taking my hat off for prayer, and I still do. Is this biblical? Paul seems to be making a strong statement about how men and women are supposed to pray and prophesy and behave in public worship, and like 1 Timothy, he roots this mandate in creation prior to the fall. Paul goes back to Adam and Eve.

1 Corinthians 11:7-10 (NIV)

A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God (“image” is Genesis 1 language); but woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. ¹⁰ It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head, because of the angels.

Paul not only roots this mandate in the creation order but in the angels. It seems like Paul is even more serious about women wearing hats (Adam & Eve + angels) than he is about them not teaching (Adam & Eve). So my question is, if we’re going to take a plain and literal reading of Paul in 1 Timothy, then we need to apply that same hermeneutic (way of reading and interpreting scripture) to 1 Corinthians 11.

Or... Maybe Paul is getting at an underlying principle that he is teaching in a context-specific way. In the case of 1 Corinthians, Paul seems to be explaining how to have an orderly and respectful worship service. Maybe we can take that same lesson, how to have an orderly and respectful worship service, and apply it to our context. But hats might not be our application. Maybe he’s doing something similar in 1 Timothy? What’s the lasting principle? Women can’t teach or lead? Or if the men are fighting and the women are dressing to attract attention to themselves, maybe it’s about restoring order and respect to the church. But how we do that might not look the exact same as their context.

Gospel Conclusion

I listened to one complementarian sermon recently that connected 1 Timothy 2:15, “But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety...” with Eve in the garden. And that it was through her childbearing and her line after her that we as believers can be saved through Jesus. I appreciate that perspective—that gospel connection. Because when it comes to this issue, we need lots of grace. Let’s come back to this next week.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA, as part of their Women in the Kingdom sermon series. You can listen to other sermons at CornerstoneWestford.com.

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Service & Sermon

You can watch the full service on Facebook or only the sermon on YouTube.

Discussion Time

Ice-Breaker: Which ice-cream flavor is best?

Prayer: Do you have a praise or prayer request?

Reflection: 1) Which of the three positions (complementarianism, egalitarianism, hybrid) are you most familiar with? 2) What's one thing you learned today? 3) What's a question you still have?

Debrief: What's one takeaway from today?

Follow-Up

Dear Church,

Thanks for listening to this past Sunday's sermon from our [Women in the Kingdom](#) sermon series. I have a few follow-up exercises and resources I hope you will find helpful. God bless.

In Christ, Pastor Jonathan

Reflect – Recount last Sunday's message. Which of the three views do you gravitate towards most naturally? What might God be teaching you about that view? Which of those views do you feel most opposed to? How might you prepare your heart to hear God's word for the next two weeks?

Confess – Confess any anger, pride, or resentment you've felt over this issue. Or maybe this issue has stirred up a whole host of feelings and emotions about a different issue entirely. Take time to pray, confess, and lay it all bare before the Lord. He knows what you feel and loves you.

Worship – What's your favorite worship song or hymn? Why don't you pull it up, stop, and take a moment to listen and worship? If you want me to pick, you could listen to [Be Thou My Vision](#) by Keith & Kristyn Getty or [Build Your Kingdom Here](#) by Rend Collective.

Sermon – If you'd like to listen to a sermon explaining and advocating for complementarianism, you could listen to [Trey VanCamp's 1 Timothy 2 sermon](#).

Articles – If you would like to understand how *The Gospel Coalition* sees 1 Corinthians 11 as different than 1 Timothy 2, [you can read their article here](#). They are complementarian but do not think women need to wear hats. Here is [how one egalitarian interprets the two texts](#) and how the [Center for Biblical Equality \(CBE\) interprets 1 Corinthians 11](#).

Book – If you'd like to read a brief book (144 pages) that makes the case modern preaching is more like prophesying and so available to women, you could read [Hearing Her Voice by John Dickson](#).

You can access our complete list of [resource recommendations here](#).