

# Women and Men - Shared Destinies in God's Kingdom

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## Introduction

That men were usually the leaders and decision makers was a belief I didn't question from childhood into my early adult years. By the time I'd made Jesus my Lord and saviour at 23 years of age - I'd finished education, worked in various art studios in Australia and overseas, lived in England, travelled across Europe, and struggled with religion and fitting into social groups. Six months later I was back in Australia and joined an international mission organisation. Over the ensuing years I held various responsibilities in one of the local training centres and led ministry teams. And found a husband and started a family.

In the mid-nineties I was also training groups in our city and beyond in discovering themselves through the DISC personality profile. This was a job I enjoyed greatly because of the understanding it brought to individuals and to teams about their strengths and limitations and how they worked together. There were moments though, during many groups I was with, that brought sadness.

Women who had as one of their strengths, D - Dominant, a focused, task- oriented trait, had often had the experience of being told "you're a woman and you can't be like that." "It's not appropriate for you to use those strengths". "There is no place for you to actually lead anything." They would tell me of their frustrations and sadness. I was puzzled, because clearly these women had the skills, capacity and gifting to lead. I felt I should lean in to learn if this is how God saw the situation.

Over the last 28 years I have kept my ears and eyes open, soaked myself in the scriptures, leaned into God, talked to many and read books. My roles, along with my husband's roles, have taken us to many places across Asia, Africa and the Middle East. I have seen our amazing God work in astounding ways, equally through both men and women, rich and poor, Jew, Gentile and Australian.

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The following, I hope, will assist you on the journey of walking with, and ministering with Jesus - forming Christ in us and amongst us, as men, women and children of God. I have not attempted to write a book, but just enough to start the journey.

Before you begin, it's informative to look at how and when you yourself arrived at your current beliefs about the roles of men and women in God's kingdom service.

*An overview of what we'll look at:*

1. The Priesthood of all believers - Roger Mack
2. Context - Understanding the Greek and Roman world view pre-Christ and 1st century.
3. Jesus - like no other male
4. Female leaders, teachers, evangelists and prophets
5. Key Words and examples
6. Passages that have troubled many.

## **1.The Priesthood of all Believers (Roger Mack)**

When Jesus rose from the dead a new order was instituted. A covenant was sealed by the blood of Jesus. A new way of knowing God was birthed and pioneered by Jesus. Finally, the presence of God was found not in a tent or building, attended to by a priestly class who represented God to the people, and the people to God. Now humanity had direct access to God through all that Jesus had accomplished. The presence of God was no longer upon humans, but within them. (Col 1:27)

Men, women, the young and the old, Jews, Greeks, Romans and slaves were finally united in one family, under one Saviour and Father. Now all who are in Christ are considered priests of God, able to worship and serve the living God, regardless of race or gender. This was foreshadowed by the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 31:31-34, "they shall be my people...all shall know me". The apostle Peter describes this new family and class of people as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation". (2 Peter 2:9)

This paper is titled "Women and Men - shared destinies in God's Kingdom" for good reason. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers precedes and lays a foundation for all other doctrines concerning roles and functions of individuals or groups in New Testament life. This significant doctrine must be well founded and understood when it comes to building communities of faith and how they are established, guided, and by whom. All followers, regardless of gender or race, can be carriers of God's presence and God can choose to work equally through all.

Without a proper understanding of how God's grace works it's effective work through his body and through individuals, regardless of race or gender, we may run into contradictions and conflicting doctrines. To be clear, there is no special class of people who have special privileges to represent God to people or people to God. If this is an agreed first principle, we can then start to build an understanding of how God uses all his people to achieve his ends, not just some.

All followers of Jesus are granted the right to embrace this priestly role. It is not a right of status or gender before other humans, but a life lived as Christ chooses to manifest his abiding grace in all who enjoy his salvation gift, in mutual submission.

If the priesthood of all believers is in fact true, not in theory, but in the Holy Spirit, then both the principle and practice of the priesthood of all believers must be consistently upheld and applied across the whole spectrum of functions in the Body of Christ, not just some.

It is surprising that many Evangelicals and Pentecostals accept this doctrine whole heartedly, yet without a thought then deny that God can use women equally. Artificial structures are created to uphold the principle that women should have no role in servant roles such as elder, leader or teacher. (These thoughts will be expanded later, examining a few texts that are taken with legalistic fervour and with inadequate account for the context they were written into, and more importantly, with little consideration to the first principle of the priesthood of all believers.) It seems as if they are scared a woman's gender might offend God if they are given a role that influences church direction or in shepharding. Even

worse they are scared that women might lead the church astray. It seems the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers suddenly does not apply in some contexts.

To illustrate, I have been in church meetings where a woman can lead worship, give announcements, read and encourage from scripture, but are not permitted to 'teach or preach' as if this would cross some spiritual line. Somehow for these churches the tap of God's grace, based in the priesthood of all believers, is turned off by others because of gender and context.

Over the last several hundred years of protestant missions an interesting statistic emerges. In some fields around 60% of foreign missionaries have been women, a large percentage of that is single women. They have contributed immensely to establishing the faith through serving, training and leading. So, God does use women it seems. Yet still in many churches contradictions and conflicting practices are upheld that infer God takes no part in using women to guide, train and shepherd his body.

Before I move on to other matters it is worth noting that context and culture do play a role in determining how groups of believers are formed, composed and importantly who leads them. Jesus emphasised the Kingdom of God, and it appears quite deliberately that he said little about church structure and governance arrangements. It seems he left it to us to contextualise these things so that in all places, at almost all times, the good news could be shared, people brought to Christ and fellowships formed – all according to the context and culture.

Therefore, in some places it is clearly better to have men lead public events for cultural reasons (e.g. 100% Muslim context). It allows others to be grafted into the body without too many obstacles to overcome. From a context and cultural point of view a preferred gender, age or status may well be far more appropriate - not to violate the principle of the priesthood of all believers, but to allow the Kingdom to be contextualised and expand.

So as we move into more detailed issues, let's keep in mind, as a first principle, the priesthood of all believers.

## **2. Context - Greek and Roman Culture, and their effect on Jewish culture.**

One of the laws of literature is that a passage must be read in the context of the whole, and in the context of the time and context of the culture the text was written into. We'll need to look at the backdrop of ancient cultures for Old Testament writings and, by and large, Greek culture and literature must be seen as the backdrop to what we read in the New Testament scriptures. Roman culture shadowed Greek culture, and along with other civilizations of the time, heavily influenced Jewish culture in the first century.

### *Greek Culture*

The Iliad and the Odyssey is one of the most well-known of Greek literature, written 800 years before Christ. So how did Homer write about gender roles? Throughout Homer's story we see that women had no power and no name. "They were the cause of all conflict and suffering. Yet they weren't playing active roles; they were merely possessions to be won, pawns in men's power games." (WNW p73) A girl or woman was always the property of the

father - 'the daughter of' - until she was handed over to her husband, and she then became his property with very restricted tasks.

Greek mythology was central to Greek culture and beliefs. So how does Greek mythology inform us? The Greek god Zeus was married to the goddess Hera. She was, it was believed, full of hatred, deception, fear and manipulation. Zeus was believed to beat her for her supposed unfaithfulness, and he had offspring with at least seven different goddesses. This was the example Greek men followed from their god, so it's no surprise wife abuse and adultery was normal. (WNW p74).

On the other hand, the Greek goddess Aphrodite was the goddess of erotic love, cheating and prostitutes. Of course, she was worshipped. The first female nude statue to be created was of Aphrodite; until the 4th century BCE only male nudes were created.

The poet Hesiod wrote 'The Theogony', a book of origins much like the book of Genesis. According to Hesiod there was a time when there was bliss - no women.

"This paradise was lost when Prometheus stole fire from the Olympian gods and shared it with other men. In a vindictive rage Zeus conceived the most horrifying punishment possible. Women were created as man's eternal curse. Zeus made 'an evil thing', a woman named Pandora, 'a beautiful evil...not to be withstood by men.' He said 'From her is the race of women...the deadly race...who live among mortal men to their great trouble.'" Semonides followed in this same foundation. He wrote "Women are the greatest of evils, the source of all other evils. It's in their nature - the way their god made them." (WNW p74) (Hesiod, *The Theogony* in Hesiod, *the Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, trans. Hugh H. Evelyn-White. (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1936),507-616.)

Women had no status other than as the property of their father or husband. They were considered a little lower than the cattle, but far more dangerous and not to be trusted. In the light of how Greek men viewed their goddess Hera - hated, not to be trusted - marriage was seen as a necessary evil to produce children, otherwise Greek men would prefer to do away with women altogether.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Plato was a student of Socrates, and Aristotle was a student of Plato. Their philosophy and ideas still form the bedrock of much of our beliefs, values and thinking in the West today, including their beliefs about women. Plato, Aristotle and Hippocrates were the 'fathers of modern medicine'.

Plato believed that "the fear of being reincarnated as a woman was enough to keep any man from sinning!" Women were only good for one thing: "Plato's utopian proposals for a few women to be trained and selected to cohabit with the men who lead the state as a means of self-controlled reproduction foreshadowed what Hitler actually did centuries later".(WNW p77).

It is said that Plato believed in education for women and equality, but his idea of equality was in the field of gymnastics - women were to behave like men, ie. play in the nude and be available for whatever came up. But in civic duties women were to be counted as public property and children were common property.

Following his mentor's philosophies Aristotle wrote: "The female is a monstrosity, a deformed male...with an evil disposition." Under such beliefs homosexuality flourished in Ancient Greece. (WNW p77) He advised Greek men "to be separate from the female, wherever possible, since it is something better and more divine."

Aristotle believed that "semen produces tiny males. But if subverted or defective, a female was born - inferior in every way." They would have been glad to find a way to have children without the need for women. (WNW p80)

Greek dramas were either tragedies or comedies. And from the dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to the comedy writers Aristophanes and Menander there is a "background of unremitting female misery." (WNW p79) Women had no more legal rights than slaves - they rarely received an education, could participate in only minimal buying and selling, could not participate in government, couldn't vote or serve on a jury. But they were responsible for the family ancestral lineage. "Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children." (Demosthenes 384-322 BC, WNW p83)

### *Roman Culture*

By the first century, Romans had taken over Greek cities and lands, but the Greeks still ruled Romans' minds and hearts, and their view of women was reinforced. The Greek goddess Hera was replaced by the Roman goddess Juno - both goddesses of marriage with the same deceptive, scheming characteristics, and under the same abuses, and so Juno was seen as "an unpleasant hag." The Greek goddess Aphrodite, goddess of erotic love and prostitutes, became the Roman goddess Venus. Greek and Roman culture worshipped Aphrodite and Venus. Erotic, available, but deceptive and mentally inferior. (WNW Loc 1263/p86) The Romans were the first to name the two closest planets Venus and Mars, and their symbols are the same as that of male and female.

Roman culture perpetuated the belief that women were inferior in every way. Female slaves had the worst of it - they were allotted the heaviest duties plus needing to be sexually available. Laws were made, whereby a woman could be killed for adultery or drinking wine (wine made them more prone to adultery). (WNW pp88,89) Female babies were routinely left to die. This practice became so normal that Romulus passed a law stating that at least one daughter had to be kept alive in every family. It was that widespread. (WNW p90)

But did Greek and Roman cultural beliefs and practices impact Jewish foundational beliefs and culture? According to Genesis, women and men have a "shared origin (Gen 2: 18-23). A shared destiny: "...they will rule...the whole earth and the creatures that crawl on the earth."(Gen 1: 26), a shared tragedy (Gen 3: 1-7) and a shared hope (Gen 3: 15)". (WNW p93)

### *Jewish Culture*

The law was given to Moses along with practices to separate the ways and beliefs of Israelites from the surrounding cultures. Slowly these laws were added to, layer upon layer, influenced by the surrounding peoples and their gods.

There were no dividing screens/walls in either the original tabernacle design, Solomon's temple or the temple built after the exiles returned. Everyone was welcome to hear. (Ex 26 & 27, 1 Kings 6, Neh 8: 2). But when Herod's temple was designed partitions were added, following the creeping belief that some people had more access to God than others. (WNW p105) (M. Kelim 1.8-9)

The Rabbis and Pharisees added to the Torah and took on Roman and Greek philosophy - especially Philo of Alexandria. Philo successfully "married revealed Truth (with a capital T) to the 'truth' that arose out of the reasoning of man." (WNW p107) The Mishnah and Talmud gave little voice to women. Gamaliel, Paul's mentor, and a few others were the exceptions. (WNW p106)

Gradually the virus of Greek thinking seeped into Jewish culture. Philo echoed Aristotle and wrote about Eve becoming subservient to men (thus bending the scriptures). But nowhere in the OT is there a divine command for wives to be in servitude to their husbands. "Echoing Aristotle, he stated firmly that man should rule over immortality and everything good, but woman over death and everything vile." (WNW p108) (Philo, *Genesis*, 1.37)

Josephus, a Jewish first century historian, and Sirach, a writer of the Apocrypha combined Judaism with the prevailing philosophies of the day. Sirach wrote: "...Better is the wickedness of man than a woman who does good; and it is a woman who brings shame and disgrace." (WNW p109) (Sirach 42:12-14 rsv)

### **3. Jesus - a man like no other**

By the first century the Jewish view of women strongly reflected the Greek and Roman view. The prevailing laws were Roman laws where women had no rights, no voice, no education and no inheritance. But Jesus saw people differently. Let's look at some of the incidences concerning women in the gospels and the circumstances where Jesus engaged with them.

Women were written about in 112 passages through Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They were prominent in Jesus' birth, death and were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Jesus taught in synagogues but also often, in the open hillsides and by the sea. This wasn't just so that the vast numbers could hear. This strategy gave women and children, not just men, the opportunity to listen and learn as well.

At the start of Jesus' ministry, when Jesus first stood to read from the scriptures and spoke in the synagogue of Nazareth, he shared from two examples of God working through prophets to save people. Both these people were gentiles, one was a widowed woman from Sidon, and one a man, Naaman a commander of the Syrian army. The two are parallel, and the woman is noted first. (Luke 4: 16-30) Jesus' lays the foundation for what Paul later affirmed: that "there is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female since you are all one in Christ Jesus." Gal 3:28

When we look at the parables, we often see Jesus aiming one parable at his male audience followed by another aimed at his female audience, running parallel with the same message. Eg. Luke 13 - the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which a man plants and, leaven

that a woman mixes into flour. Luke 15 - a lost sheep which a man looks for and, a lost coin, which a woman looks for.

Jesus often broke with the norms of Jewish thinking, especially in the way he spoke to women and children and how he treated them. In Luke 13:16 Jesus called a woman “a daughter of Abraham”. Jews normally referred to Jews as ‘sons of Abraham’. Women were never referred to in feminine terms, but Jesus honoured this woman with the female noun.

Jews considered it improper for women to be taught, but with Jesus, women participated. Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet”, the description of a disciple quietly learning. (Luke 10:38-42) To Martha, Jesus shared the central message of the gospel, “I am the resurrection and the life...” and, he asked what she thought: “Do you believe this?” (John 11:25,26)

Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4) is the longest recorded private conversation in the gospels and she is the first to hear Jesus’ statement that he is the Messiah. She became the first evangelist - many in her town believed because of her testimony.

Jesus spoke of men and women, indeed all humanity, as equals. Jesus was given the opportunity one day to talk about divorce and God’s original design when the Pharisees asked Jesus a question about divorce. (Matt 19: 3-12 and Mark 10: 2-12). Jesus quotes from Genesis 2: 23-24, “...God made them male and female. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What God has joined together let not man separate.” In other words, made male and female, equal in design, becoming equally one, united. He goes on to say to his disciples that with husband or wife, if they divorce their spouse, they were committing adultery. This was radical - traditionally only the woman was required to leave everything, including their father’s gods when they married, and become part of the husband’s household. Jesus says no, the same rules apply to wives and to husbands. This was so radical that the disciples replied effectively, ‘If it’s like this it’s better not to marry!’ (Matt 19: 3-11)

In Luke 20 Jesus gave a surprising answer to the Sadducees. He answers that in heaven, men and women will not marry, there will be no gender, “...they are like angels and are children of God...” vv35,36. Women and men really do have a shared destiny and hope.

The disciples had trouble giving a woman’s words the same weight as a man’s report. Luke writes in chapter 24:11 that when the women returned with the news about Jesus’ resurrection, their words seemed to the eleven ‘an idle tale’. This was the norm for Jewish culture. It’s hardly surprising that the eleven didn’t believe the testimony of the women reporting on the empty tomb that sabbath morning - there’s little evidence they ever wavered from the prevailing belief about women until that point. “In the ancient world, the testimony of a woman was not accepted in a court of law. First century historian, Josephus infamously said it like this: ‘From women let no evidence be accepted, because of the levity and flippancy of their gender.’” (JJ pp 214,215)

It's actually one of the facts that historians believe authenticates the truth of Jesus' resurrection: if his followers were going to make up a story about their messiah rising from the dead, they'd never state that women were the first witnesses.

By the time the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans and Galatians, Jesus' view had sunk in: "The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to *all* who believe, since there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:22-23, emphasis mine). "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28)

#### **4. Female leaders, teachers, evangelists, prophets, ministers and guardians.**

Examples of women in scripture whom God ministered through in a variety of capacities and anointings.

- *Miriam*, (Exodus 15: 20, Micah 6:4) God sent Moses, Aaron and their sister Miriam to lead the people. Miriam was a prophetess.

- *Deborah*, (Judges 4 & 5) After Joshua, Deborah was the fourth judge in Israel at a time when King Jabin, with 900 chariots, harshly oppressed Israel for twenty years. People were afraid to go about their normal lives, roads and villages were deserted. Disputes arose between people. Deborah says of herself "villages were deserted until I arose a mother in Israel" Judges 5: 6-8, and in 4:5 that she settled disputes amongst the Israelites. She was prophetic, and called people to take courage and act. Deborah called Barak to deploy troops and lead Israel against Sisera and King Jabin. However Barak didn't want to go unless Deborah went with him. It was Deborah who called him to courage in the Lord, went with him, and declared when the battle was to start, and the Lord gave them victory over Sisera and all his chariots. Sisera though, was killed not by Barak but by a courageous woman named Jael, in her own tent.

- *Huldah*, a prophetess in the time of King Josiah (2 Kings 22: 11-20). Josiah asked the high priest along with the court secretary, a servant and two others, to enquire of the Lord. They all went to Huldah to hear from her what the Lord had to say. Her message from the Lord was a turning point for King Josiah and the people of Judah.

- *Anna*, a prophetess who, along with Simeon, was at the temple the day Jesus' parents brought him to the temple to be dedicated. She spoke of Jesus "to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem." (Luke 2: 25-38)

- *The Samaritan woman* (John 4: 1- 43) Jesus had a deep theological discussion with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Up to this point it's not recorded that Jesus had had a discussion and revealed himself like this with even his disciples. She was not only a woman, but a hated Samaritan and, she'd had five husbands and was living with a guy! Outrageous. The disciples wanted to get rid of her (that's what's implied by their question on returning to the well). To be seen talking with her was way outside their comfort and moral zone. As a consequence of Jesus' interaction with her, this woman became a key person in leading her community to life and faith in Jesus.

-*Martha and Mary* - sisters whom loved Jesus. Mary sat at Jesus' feet, a term of learning, not what was normally allowed for a Jewish woman. (Luke 10:38-42)

Jesus' conversation with Martha in John 11: 20-27, gave her insight to lead her to declare who Jesus was. Peter was the only other disciple to have Jesus' identity revealed by Holy Spirit before Jesus' resurrection.

- *The women who gave the first report of the resurrection*- The report of the resurrection was entrusted to the women who first came to the tomb. As already stated, their report was not believed at first, until it was verified. (John 20:1-18, Luke 23:55 - 24:12, Mark 16:1-11, Matt 28:1-10)

- Joel's prophecy: "your sons and daughters will prophesy...I will even pour out my Spirit on my servants in those days, both men and women." (Acts 2:17-18 from Joel 2: 28-29)

- *The four daughters of Philip*, all prophetesses. (Acts 21:8-9)

- *Lydia* (Acts 16: 14, 15 & 40) "...she and her household believed." She was a wealthy, Philippian citizen and since no husband is mentioned, probably the head of the house, and most likely therefore, the elder of the believers in her home. "The homeowner in Greco-Roman times was in charge of any group that met in his or her domicile and was legally responsible for the group activities." (TVWM p56)

- *Phoebe* (Romans 16:1- 2) Phoebe was a "diakonos" a minister or servant of the church in Cenchræe, and a 'prostatist' - a female guardian or benefactor. Paul's connection of a specific church with this word diakonos, makes it likely that she had a leadership role, if not the main leader. Paul was introducing and commending her to the Roman believers. (See link B)

- *Prisca or Priscilla*, wife of Aquila, (Act 18:2, 18, 26, Rom 16:3, 1 Cor 16:19, 2 Tim 4:19) a teacher and fellow worker with Paul. That Priscilla is mentioned along with her husband indicates she was well honoured amongst Paul's team. That her name appears before her husband's four out of the six times mentioned in the scriptures indicates she was probably the main teacher. Some scholars believe Priscilla could have been the anonymous writer of Hebrews.

- *Junias*, (Romans 16: 7) along with Andronicus, were "fellow prisoner(s) and outstanding among apostles". This text is often translated as 'Junia', as if being an outstanding apostle is a recommendation that could only be attributed to a male. But the name Junias is only ever female, there is no equivalent Greek male name. And if your translation adds "in the eyes of the apostles..." please note that "the eyes of" is a translator's addition.

- *Julia*, along with Philologus, Nereus and his sister and Olympas (Romans 16:15) - noted to be greeted.

- *Euodia, Syntyche and Clement*, (Philippians 4: 2,3) - Fellow workers with Paul. Because these women were named, it is most likely that their role was one of leadership, and their disagreement put the unity of the church in jeopardy. (TVWM p59)

- *Chloe* (1 Corinthians 1: 11) Chloe reports to Paul that there is rivalry among members of the church. Most likely Chloe sends the report because she was an elder or the overseer. Note, “members of” and “people” are written in some translations, but do not appear in the Greek.

- *Nympha* (Colossians 4:15) Nympha had a church in her home, so she would have been the overseer or elder.

## 5. Key Words

The following words are worth looking at as their understanding is critical to some of the key, disputed passages.

- *Diakonos* - (Strong's 1249, noun) minister, deacon, servant of the church.

Diakonos as servants are referred to throughout the gospels. But Paul talks about servants as being servants of the church, or ministers:

- Jesus in Romans 15:8,
- Phoebe in Rom 16:1,
- Apollos and Paul in 1 Cor 3:5,
- Paul and Timothy in Phil 1:1, Col 1:25.
- Tychicus in Col 4:7.
- In the context of Paul's list of qualifications - 1Tim 3:8,12

- *Diakoneo* - (Strong's 1247, verb) minister, serve, eg Mark 15:40-42, Acts 6:2, 1 Tim 3:13, Heb 6:10, 1 Pet 1:12, 4:10 (using gifts to serve others).

- *Presbyteros* - (strong's 4245) 'elders' is the most common translation, but sometimes translated as older men and older women, instead of male elders and female elders. Used 72 times in NT.

Eg Matt 15:2, Mark 8:31, Luke 20:1, Acts 11:30, 20:17, Titus 1:5, 1 Tim 5:1, 2, and 17. (Translated as older men 1 Tim 5:1, older women 1 Tim 5:2 and elders in 1 Tim 5:17).

- *Presbyteres* - (Strong's 4246) male elders/older men - eg Titus 2:2.

- *Presbytis* - (Strong's 4247) female elders/older women - eg Titus 2:3.

'Presbyteres' and 'presbytis' stand side by side with 'presbyteros', as in Titus 1:5.

- *Episkope* - (Strong's 1984) office of overseer/elder, visitation, inspection. Eg 1 Tim 3:1.

- *Episkopos* - (Strong's 1985) an overseer, guardian, Eg 1 Tim 3:2 and also Acts 20:28, Phil 1:1, Titus 1:7, 1Peter 2:25.

- *Apostolos*- (Strong's 652) apostle, Eg Acts 15:23, 16:1, Rom 1:1 and 11:13 (Paul), Rom 16:7 (Andronicus and Junia), 1 Cor 12: 28, 1 Cor 15:9, 2 Cor 11:13 & 12:12, Eph 2:20, Eph 4:11, Heb 3:11, 1 Tim 1:1

- "*heis aner gyne/ heis gyne aner*" - one man woman /one woman man, as in 1 Tim 3: 2, 12, and in 1 Tim 5:9 and Titus 1: 6. This phrase has been found on first century tombstone inscriptions. The most likely and widely accepted understanding of this is that it's a statement of monogamy. It does not mean you have to be married to be an elder, only that if the elder is married, they would need to be faithful to one partner. (See Link A)

This phrase is often translated as “the husband of one wife”. There was no need to instruct women about monogamy, (unless their husband had died and the woman was a widow, (1 Tim 5:9). Culturally, Greek men could have wives, mistresses and concubines, but women could not have more than one husband - this wasn’t tolerated in Greek/Roman culture. Extramarital affairs for men were normal in cities like Corinth and Ephesus, “indeed the divorce rate among Greek men rivaled ours today.” (TVWM p62)

## 6. Key Passages

Let’s now look at some of the passages most often referred to when citing womens’ ineligibility to be leaders or elders.

### 6 a. Titus 1 and 2

Paul is writing to Titus, “my true son”, a Greek brother and leader whom we first meet in Galatians and again in Corinthians.

Titus is sent to appoint elders (presbyteros 1:5,6) and overseers (episkopos 1:7-9) from the brothers and sisters of the church in Crete. They were to bring order where needed 1:10-14, to teach, remind and insist 2:1, 3:1, 3:8, and to encourage 2:1.

Titus was to be an example himself, 2:7 and bring discipline when needed, 3:10.

As mentioned earlier, our understanding of who are to be elders is formed on the basis of the words: ‘presbyteros’ (plural elders or older people) 1:5, ‘presbytes’ (male elders or older men) 2:2, ‘presbytis’ (female elders or older women) 2:3 and, ‘episkopos’ (overseer) 1:7. Paul uses all of the above when giving instructions to Titus about appointing elders and their roles. ‘Presbytes’ and ‘presbytis’ must be translated as ‘male and female elders’ then, if ‘presbyteros’ is translated as ‘elders’.

‘Heis gyne aner’ in Titus 1:6, as already noted, refers to monogamy if married. There are no pronouns in verses 5-10, (the Greek word ‘tis’ is used in v6 which means who, what, anyone), so the neutral pronoun ‘they’ should be used throughout these verses.)

There are specific areas to be upheld and encouraged in male elders - presbytes, and likewise for female elders - presbytis. They in turn are to teach and encourage the younger men and women mentioned. 2: 1-7a.

### 6 b. 1 Corinthians 11-14. Public Worship

The larger context of 1 Corinthians: There was division and rivalry amongst the body of believers. The Corinthians’ cultural backdrop included endless debating and false teachers, idol worship, temple practices and prostitution, every form of sexual sin, lawsuits and disputes, knowledge over and above love, along with the low education and status of women, and the Greek household code.

The issues around order in public worship begin in chapter 11 and continue through to the end of chapter 14. Preceding this section in chapter 10 Paul talks about their freedoms in the Lord and yet “not everything builds up. No one is to seek his own good, but the good of the other person.” Ch 10: 23,24 and also v 33. This lays the foundation for the chapters ahead.

1 Corinthians 11: 2- 16: Men and women praying and prophesying in the public assembly. Even though as believers they had complete freedom to dress as they liked, in Greek culture there were ways to dress that honoured each other and did not reflect past lifestyles. It is thought that female temple prostitutes shaved their heads while men grew their hair long. In statues and art of the first century, womens' hair was often depicted tied up, wrapped or veiled with one of the folds of the Chiton or Himation.

Without going into a long explanation on these verses, the main point is, Paul begins these four chapters with instructions for "every man who prays or prophesies...and every woman who prays and prophesies..." in public gatherings. 1 Cor 11:4,5. The activity of both men and women who pray and prophecy is treated as identical. There is respect for the culture they live in with regard to the way they dress (11:13), interdependence on each other, and dependence on God. (11:11&12.). (For a comprehensive look at 1 Cor 11: 2-16, see *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*. Bailey, Kenneth)

Chapter 11: 17- 34. Remembering the Lord's supper together - divisions and their lack of love toward each other do not build up the church. V 18, 21,22

Chapter 12 - Using Spiritual gifts so that there are no divisions, all are built up. The gifts are given to the whole body, male and female. vv12-13, 25-27.

Chapter 12:31 -13:13. The high way (or better way) of love - no disputes, no boasting, building each other up in love.

Chapter 14. Worship and building up the church - **So who should keep silent and why?**  
Ch 14:1-40 - The Corinthians, male and female, were instructed to "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy." Paul goes on to give instruction in prophesying and speaking in tongues in an orderly way for building up the church. Keep in mind the background of these Corinthians - 'worship' in the temples was loud and chaotic. Keeping order in the church so that the church could be built up is the repeated idea of this chapter.

So when we come to 1 Cor 14: 26-40, the context is orderly worship:

verse 26 "Let all things be done for building up."

verse 33: "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

verse 40: "But all things should be done decently and in order."

Instructions are given for when the believers, male and female, come together v 26: "...each one has a hymn, a teaching, a revelation, another tongue, or an interpretation. Everything is to be done for building up."

Everyone is to contribute and speak but three times Paul instructs different groups to be silent for the sake of order:

1. A person is to keep silent and not speak in tongues if there's no one to interpret (ie it won't build up the body –it will sound chaotic.) v 27,28

2. If two or three are prophesying, the first is to be silent “so that everyone may learn and everyone may be encouraged.” v29-31

3. “Women should be silent in the churches for they are not permitted to speak, but are to submit themselves as the law also says.” v34. Women were to be silent (instead of making lots of noise as they would normally do in the temple or the market place), because this was about order and building up. They were to submit themselves... to God, to the orderliness and building up of the gathering, and to their own spirit. (No mention of submission to a husband or authority figure here).

Note that for each of these three groups, there are times when they are free to speak and contribute, such as in praying and prophesying. The point was to keep order, not to bar them from contributing at all. Remember, Priscilla was one of the teachers in Corinth and Ephesus and a coworker with Paul. She was not ‘silent’.

Paul then gives instruction to husbands, that their wife was to be taught at home, if she desired. The women being unschooled, have questions, so start teaching them. Literally, v35, “if they want to learn something they can enquire, demand, interrogate their own husbands at home.” This was revolutionary.

Verse 35b: “For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church”. According to Kenneth Bailey in “Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes” and David Hamilton in “Why Not Women”, this seems to be a quote from Greek literature, like the quotes used in 1 Corinthians 6:12, and 15:33 (a quote from Menander’s comedy ‘Thais’).

Verse 36: the Greek word ‘eta’ is used twice in the following verse. It’s only translated as ‘or’ in most translations, but it means something similar to ‘What!!!’, ‘nonsense!’, ‘Are you kidding!’ (WNW p190,191). Paul introduced 14 questions in 1 Corinthians with ‘eta’ (looks like an ‘n’ in Greek). Paul is saying this quote in v35b, is nonsense.

“So, should women ‘be silent’? Yes just like men. Should women be prepared to minister with ‘a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue of interpretation’? Yes, just like men. Should women exercise self control as they minister? Yes, just like men. Should women seek to educate themselves so that they can better edify others when they minister? Yes, just like men. ‘For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.’” (Hamilton p204, Why Not Women.)

### **6c. 1 Timothy**

The setting was Ephesus where Paul had started the movement of churches a decade or so before. The temple of Diana, or Artemis, was the greatest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It took 120 years to build the structure, was larger than the field of an Olympic stadium, its pillars were five stories high and could be seen from the sea, covered in colours and gold. (WNW pp205,206)

Artemis was the fertility goddess with twelve pairs of bare breasts (small statues of Artemis can still be seen in museums in Rome) and pilgrims came from all over the world to indulge. It was a moral nightmare. Ovid wrote of the temple’s orgies and religious prostitutes plus the

orgiastic rites and sacrifices of other religions and witchcraft. This then was the background and world view of the majority of the Ephesian believers. After Paul and his team came to Ephesus they led so many people to Christ that the city's economy was threatened. Acts 19.

The main theme of Paul's letter to Timothy, and the reason Timothy is in Ephesus, is to deal with false doctrine, and to instruct Timothy in bringing order, faith and godliness into the churches- 1 Tim 1:3-7,18 &19, 3:15, 4:1-7, 6:1-5, 6:20-21.

*1 Tim 2: 1-15 Prayer and how the Ephesians were to pray.*

These fifteen verses are written in a structure with a chiasm, which is mirrored in Ch 3:1-13.

> ALL > MEN > WOMEN > A WOMAN > ALL

> 1 Tim 2:1-7. Prayer for ALL so that we "may lead a peaceful and quiet life". (1:2)

2: 3-6 The intimate heart of the gospel – God's desire for ALL people: that they be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, through the mediator Jesus the man, who became the mediator for every man and woman and gave himself for all.

> 2: 8 Paul instructs how MEN (plural) should pray- in holiness and without anger.

> 2: 9,10 Then he gives instructions for WOMEN: "In the same way/ likewise, women (plural) should pray and dress as those who profess or proclaim- with decency and self control". In the first century, ostentation in dress was considered a mark of promiscuity. One author of antiquity said, 'A wife who likes adornment is not faithful.' Not only that, the Romans prized pearls above all other jewels." (Hamilton WNW, p212). Professing or proclaiming is not silent. Women were certainly supposed to speak and pray, but in a respectful way. (1 Cor 11:5)

> 2:11-15a A WOMAN - There is a grammatical shift from plural nouns to singular nouns in these verses - "a woman", "she". Paul was not referring to the collective term 'a woman', he was using a singular word. This particular woman could have been one of the false teachers of 1Tim 1:3-7, 6:3 - the pronouns used in these verses are gender inclusive.

Paul compares this woman with Eve, who was deceived, vv13,14. He doesn't name the woman (just as Paul didn't name the man committing incest in Corinth and Titus' contentious person of Crete) - perhaps he hoped she would be restored because she was deceived and not yet disciplined in new life in Christ. Paul had, on the other hand, named the men who had gone astray, in 1Tim 1:20, possibly because they had already been warned and had rejected the faith.

What must this unnamed woman do? She must learn quietly, (verse 11 and referenced again in verse 12) an unusual instruction for Paul to give Timothy, as women normally had no opportunity to learn connected with deeper learning (as opposed to being a dutiful wife/servant). This is Paul's one command in this chapter.

This woman needed to learn but she was not permitted to teach. 1 Tim 2:12. What was she not permitted to teach or practice? 'Authentien' is the word Paul used here, not the word 'authority' found in many English translations. The Greek word for authority is either

“hyperoche” as in 1 Tim 2: 2 or, “exousia” Eg Matt 7:29, 8:9, 9:6, Acts 26:10, 1 Cor 11:10 (103 times in NT).

‘Authentien’/ ‘authenteo’: is the Greek word used in verse 12 in the earliest manuscripts up until the 3rd century. The closest meaning taken from literature of the same period (and there’s very little literature where this word is found) is: “to teach and exercise sexual dominance over” with added overtones of murder. It was a very unsavoury word, only used once here in the whole of scripture and this is the reason, it is thought, that the word ‘authenteo’ was changed in manuscripts from the third century.

Amongst the examples of women who teach, Priscilla and her husband Aquila, were teachers in Corinth and also with Timothy amongst the Ephesian churches. According to Paul, teaching by a woman was not a problem when it came to teaching godliness and the kingdom of God.

> Verses 13-15a - Eve in the Genesis account and this Ephesians woman were both deceived. “Eve didn’t become deceived because of some inherent weakness in women.” (WNW p223) God addressed Adam first in Gen 3:9, because he had been given instructions by God and, it seems, hadn’t passed on these instructions clearly to Eve. “Some would try to take Paul’s instructions to Timothy to mean that women are more easily deceived than men, therefore not to be trusted as Bible teachers. Paul never said that. He wasn’t defining universal gender traits here. He was simply talking about two women who had been deceived, then fallen into sin- nothing more. To try to stretch this into some statement of inborn strengths and weaknesses in men and women twists the text.” (WNW p223)

> Verse 15a and 15b returns to plural pronouns - THEY. “But (she) will be saved (sozo) through THE childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness, with self control.” V15a “The childbearing” is a noun, not a verb, and this phrase is not found anywhere else in the New Testament. This could only mean the child who was born to save us, Jesus (the focus of Paul’s letter), since *there is no other way to be saved!* V15b reflects Paul’s opening in Chapter 1:5, that our response to the gospel is faith, love and holiness, regardless of whether you are male or female.

### 1 Timothy 3. God’s household (oikos)

What to look for in choosing someone to be an Episkope - overseer (used 4 times in NT), and Diakonos - minister, deacon, servant. The structure is a mirror of chapter 2:

> ALL > OVERSEERS > DEACONS > MEN > WOMEN > ALL

The first thing to note is Paul used the word “anyone” (tis) when talking about those who wanted to be leaders/overseers, in v1. Paul then sets out guidelines for leaders (episkopos), and then to deacons (diakonos), specifically to men and then to women.

There are no pronouns in the Greek throughout 1 Tim 3: 1-13. To make sense in English, pronouns have been added. When talking about deacons in vv8-13 the pronoun ‘they’ has rightly been used. However, when referring to overseers in vv1-7, the pronoun ‘he’ has often incorrectly been used in English translations, rather than ‘they’. This may be because of the phrase ‘heis gyne aner’ - one woman man, as mentioned earlier. (See Link C)

'Gyne' is used again in v11 and can be translated woman or wives, (just as 'aner' can be translated man or husband), but these are instructions to deacons and the Greek word order is identical to the instructions given to men in vv 8-10, so translating gyne as 'women' is truer to context. (TVWM -loc 60) Note also that both men and women managed households, as in ch 5:14.

1 Timothy 5: 1-2 & 17 Presbyteros - elder (translated here in many translations as older man or older woman). "Don't rebuke a 'presbyteros/elder but rather appeal as a father, younger as brothers, 'presbyteros/elder as mothers, younger as sisters with all purity." Direct translation 1Tim 5:1,2.

How are we to conclude? "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest." (Matt 9: 37-38)

Does God truly mean that no churches can be planted or leaders raised when no (good) men are available to lead? Are people not to be reached with the gospel, not disciplined into believing groups and churches if the context provides only women are available to do the job? These questions hardly need an answer. Indeed women are starting movements of new believers, leading churches and organisations, teaching children, adults and leaders and being kingdom examples in thousands of contexts on every continent.

The vision that you see for your own life, and what God may do through you, will be skewed without the foundation of the priesthood of all believers, and the gifts that everyone brings to the table. "There is neither Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female since you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28) If salvation eliminates gender bias, why then would God impose gender bias on these saved people when they seek to serve one another and the world? Yes, we need to consider cultural implications when appointing leaders and elders in some contexts (eg. groups in the Muslim world), but even then these would be the exception, not the norm.

It is my hope that in having a good look at God's heart and desire expressed in his Word and through His Spirit, that we will embrace the gifts that God has poured out to each believer, men and women, so that as Paul said to Timothy in 1 Tim 2:4 "...everyone may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

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Cunningham, Loren and Hamilton, David. "Why Not Women? (WNW): A fresh look at scripture on women in missions, ministry and leadership. YWAM Publishing, 2000. David brings 6000 hours of research for his master's thesis, with a bibliography of more than 400 books to the pages of 'Why Not Women', including Homer, Hesiod, Plato's "Laws" and "The Republic", Aristotle's "The Generation of Animals", and works by Aristophanes, Pomeroy, Euripides and Menander, to name a few. David is fluent in several modern languages as well as the languages of the bible and has extensively studied Greek and Roman history and literature.

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\*\* Phoebe and the word 'diakonos'. sbl-site.org Stele inscriptions on tombstones of the 4th century give evidence of women noted as 'diakonos'.  
See also "Society of Biblical Literature. A Reexamination of Phoebe as a Diakonos and Prostatis".

Link A. "man one woman' [https://tiro3.typepad.com/spoudazo\\_logos\\_blog/2015/04/elders-women-and-1-timothy.html](https://tiro3.typepad.com/spoudazo_logos_blog/2015/04/elders-women-and-1-timothy.html)"

Link B. Phoebe Rom 16 - further reading: <https://www.faithward.org/devotional-phoebe-deacon-and-benefactor/>

Link C. <https://herheartforgod.com/paul-where-are-all-the-male-pronouns/>  
ALSO: <https://www.pbpayne.com/does-one-woman-man-in-1-timothy-32-require-that-all-overseers-be-male>

A novel "Last Seen in Massilia", Steven Saylor, based on 1st Century BC Roman history.  
See "The Roman Republic and the Founder of the Empire", (1923) T. Rice Holmes. Also, "The Civil War", Julius Caesar.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Christian Standard Bible, 2017, Holman Bible Publishers.