



Looking to the Vote and Beyond: affirmations and clarifications

Romans 12:10, "*Honor one another above yourselves.*" These words of the Apostle Paul have resounded in my heart and mind since our congregational meeting. Thank you to the many who chose to be there. I know that this kind of meeting can be incredibly hard, and yet they are vital to our fellowship. **In the wake of the congregational meeting, a few matters need affirmation and clarification.**

First, I want to call us all to the humility of acknowledging that godly, Christ-honoring, Scripture-faithful Christians have come to different conclusions on this matter, and not just recently, but down through Church history (see below).

We also need to acknowledge that there are strong feelings on both sides of this conversation. As was evidenced on at the meeting, some feel great personal satisfaction, blessing and even a sense of liberation within the complementarian interpretation, whereas others feel great personal pain, dishonor and injustice.

In the end, both perspectives are rooted in a distinct interpretation of Scripture, a commitment to follow God's revelation fully, and a strong affirmation of the goodness of God in all that God desires.

Second, one aspect of this conversation that we often miss is the influence of church history, or, in this case, our perception of church history. In truth, our self-references to being "traditional", "conservative", or even "progressive" are often odd considering the history of the church on an issue like this.

For instance, although it is true that male-only leadership has been a common view in much of church history, it is helpful to know that 100 years ago many trusted and influential evangelical bible teachers and Christian leaders, affirming the inerrancy of scripture, advocated strongly for the full empowerment of women in ministry and leadership. D.L. Moody, A.B. Simpson, and Charles Finney are just three examples. (For more on this, see **Appendix 1** on church history.)

Which means the contemporary acceptance of complementarian practice in many circles is not always a matter of conserving the tradition, but sometimes the adoption of a recent theological change. Just as some suggest that the contemporary openness to biblical egalitarianism is driven not by scripture, but by following the shift of culture, so it can be argued that many church's current allegiance to complementarianism is actually the result of the church giving in to cultural shifts in the mid-20th century.



Although knowledge of the past does not and should not dictate the future, it does help us better understand the story we find ourselves in and invites us to listen to scripture and those who've gone before us with humility.

Third, we are very aware that nowhere in our congregational study have we explicitly addressed the "elder qualification" texts in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. This is an understandable sticking point for some, but the rationale for this has been that most complementarian teachers anchor their interpretation of the elder qualification on their understanding of the explicit prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Regarding 1 Timothy 2:11-15, I have argued that Paul's prohibition is authoritative as inspired-scripture, but misapplied as a universal ban on women speaking in church and exercising authority over men. To do so would require rejecting Paul's teaching and example elsewhere in the New Testament – where he consistently honors and affirmed the voice and leadership influence of women in the Christian community. Interpreted in context, and in the light of Paul's other teaching and example, the universal implication of Paul's command in 1 Timothy 2 is that women are empowered to learn, and that those who teach should first embrace the posture of a learner – a principle that is equally true of men as of women. (See **Appendix 2** for a few specific comments on interpreting the elder qualification texts.)

Thank you for taking time to read this and take it to heart as we move toward the vote and beyond.

Seeking Jesus with you and for you,
Scott Anderson
Lead pastor

Appendix 1 – Women in Church Leadership 100 Years Ago

Although it is true that male-only leadership has been a common view in much of church history, it is helpful to know that 100 years ago many trusted and influential evangelical bible teachers and Christian leaders, affirming the inerrancy of scripture, advocated strongly for the full empowerment of women in ministry and leadership.

D.L. Moody (founder of Moody Bible Institute in 1886), **A.B. Simpson** (1843-1919, founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance), **A.J. Gordon** (founder of Gordon College in 1889, now Gordon-Conwell University) were all passionate advocates for women to preach, pastor and lead in the church. Consequently, the educational institutions they founded all, in their early decades, proudly taught, equipped and sent out women to do just that.



Similarly, **Charles Finney**, the 19th century revivalist, was a passionate advocate of women in all spheres of leadership, calling converts to sign on and join the fight. For each of these men, this conviction was the clear outworking of their commitment to biblical inerrancy.

Reflecting on the urgency of the mission in their day, **Fredrick Franson** (founding leader in the Evangelical Free Church in America in the 1890's, a movement that equally welcomed women and men to serve at all levels of church leadership), argued,

*"When one has been sent out on the field and heard the real cries for help from dozens of places, places to which one cannot possibly reach, then one cannot help but think, 'It seems strange that only such a few verses of Scripture, about which there are so many disputes, should be made such obstacles to hinder those who otherwise would have responded to these calls for help.'"**

Similarly, it is instructive to know that the Southern Baptist Convention, currently the largest denomination in America and one of the most vocal male-only leadership movements in our day, has only recently coalesced around this interpretation. Prior to the year 2000, women were ordained in the SBC, and in the early years of the movement, some states had more women leading churches than men. It was only in the mid-80's that the SBC experienced a major theological shift toward complementarianism as an explicit reaction against broader cultural concerns.

As stated above, studying church history helps us see that the contemporary acceptance of complementarian practice in many circles is not always a matter of conserving the tradition, but sometimes the adoption of a recent theological change. Just as some suggest that the contemporary openness to biblical egalitarianism is driven not by scripture, but by following the shift of culture, so it can be argued that many church's current allegiance to complementarianism is actually the result of the church giving in to cultural shifts in the mid-20th century.

(*see Janette Hassey's article, "Evangelical Women in Ministry a Century Ago")

Appendix 2 – Do the elder qualification texts prohibit women from serving as elders?

Two comments need to be made.

First of all, we need to understand that, although most of our translations include "he/his" throughout this text (i.e. the ESV has 8 male pronouns in the first 8 verses), "in the original Greek text, there are no masculine pronouns. Instead, Paul uses the generic

* see "Women and Men in the Ministry of Imago Dei Community" statement



pronoun *tis*, translated as “whoever” or “anyone.” A more literal translation of 1 Timothy 3:1-6 would read as follows:

“Trustworthy is the saying: Whoever [*tis*] aspires to [the office of] overseer desires a good work. It is necessary therefore that the overseer be without reproach, a “one-woman man” [literal translation], temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, apt at teaching, not an excessive drinker, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy; managing one’s household well, having children in subjection with all gravity—but if someone [*tis*] does not know how to manage one’s own family, how would one care for God’s church?—not a recent convert, lest being puffed up, one become conceited and fall into the devil’s snare” (Witt 319-20).”*

Notice that in the original language this passage is not notably *gender-oriented*, but *character-focussed*.

Which leads to the second point – Paul’s explicit statement that an elder must be “faithful to his wife”, or “the husband of one wife”. This seems to be a **clear statement** that an elder must be a man (and by explicit implication, not a woman).

Two comments need to be made regarding this. First of all, we need to acknowledge that every other qualification is undeniably about an elder’s character (i.e. “above reproach, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable...” etc).

But with this, *and this is a point that some complementarian bible scholars also make*, this phrase “one-woman man” (literal translation) needs to be understood as a known idiom in Paul’s day that referred **not** primarily to one’s sex, but to one’s **character**. It would be similar to referring to someone today as a “stand-up guy”. Although “guy” implies male, the primary thrust of the phrase is about the **character** of the individual.

This is how many understand Paul’s phrase – “one-woman man.”

Which, I admit, may sound like a classic example of someone attempting to redefine a word to make it mean what one wants; **except** for the fact that Paul uses this same qualification for deacons in v.12, just after having explicitly referred to women deacons (v.11) (though some translations obscure this by translating *women* as *wives*).

Douglas Moo, a complementarian New Testament scholar, argues that this phrase ‘one woman man’ does not exclude unmarried men or females from the office... it would be going too far to argue that the phrase clearly excludes women.”

Again, some complementarians will disagree with this interpretation – arguing that it betrays the plain (literal) meaning of the text. But I would suggest that although this

* see “Women and Men in the Ministry of Imago Dei Community” statement



interpretation may seem inconsistent with our contemporary translations, *it is not inconsistent with the original text.*

As Bruce Milne, a trusted British evangelical of another era, taught in his book Know the Truth, honoring Scripture “requires that we interpret Scripture according to the original meaning, the literary form, and context”. If we disregard these, we are likely not allowing Scripture to speak.

This is why we do not believe that the elder qualification texts require excluding women from eldership. Paul’s explicit concern is not the sex or marital status of an elder, but their *moral character* – that elders are to be those who truly embody a life lived in Christ, a life “that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11).