**Women and Ministry Position Summaries**

**Introductory Assumptions**

1. No position possesses a “one-size-fits-all” reality. What follows are summaries. No one summary can take into account all the nuances and twists of direction that exist within a position. Each summary below attempts to present the general flow and logic of the position.

2. All labels fall short in some way or other. This paper uses the terms *complementarian* and *egalitarian* to identify the two positions described. Some would prefer *traditional* or *feminist*; others even different labels. Whichever chosen, the terms will fail to completely identify and describe the position.

3. Both positions believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that it is authoritative to our thinking and living. The differences in the positions are not due to a lessened commitment to the authority of scripture but to differences in how to interpret and apply the Bible’s input as to how women can and should minister.

**A Complementarian Perspective on Women and Ministry**

1. (Genesis 1:26-28) Both men and women are created equal by God, fully human and reflecting the image of God. Both are mandated to rule on behalf of God over his creation.

2. (Genesis 2:15-24) An order of creation has been established. In temporal priority man was created first. He was given the task of working the garden and received the eating prohibition to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He named the animals. In response to the “non-goodness” of his being alone, woman was created out of him. She was created a “helper suitable for him.” Some see in this a functional subordination for the woman while others see the woman as completing the man, helping him rule creation.

3. (Genesis 3:1-24) The woman was tempted and encouraged the man to eat and disobey God. Instead of leading, the man listened, ignoring the creation order while sinning with the woman. Relationships were damaged between the man, woman and God and between the man and woman. Some see verse sixteen as a curse/punishment prescription (a command) that as a result of the Fall man would rule over woman.

4. Even though there are illustrations of women in “ministry” and leadership roles in the Old Testament, it is noteworthy that while there are female prophets there are only male priests. Some believe this is so because it is the priests who teach the Law to the people (Deuteronomy 17:11; 33:10). It is also noteworthy that throughout both the Old and the New Testaments, God images himself as male.

5. Jesus Christ stretched and at times broke the cultural and social rules and expectations of the day in regards to women. He treated them with unusual respect and honor: talking to them (John 4); accepting their adoration and worship (Luke 7:36-50); receiving their financial and other support (Luke 8:1-3); and teaching them, allowing them into a discipleship connection with him (Luke 10:38-41). Nevertheless, when Jesus chose his twelve apostles, he chose only men (Luke 6:12-16).

6. The practice of the early church in regards to women and ministry, especially in the example of the Apostle Paul, is instructive. Women were involved in leadership ministry roles in the church (see point 6 in the egalitarian perspective below). The Holy Spirit gave spiritual gifts and ministry ability to whomever he chose, apparently with no regard as to whether they were male or female. All the gifts were available to either. There were, however, limitations as to where or in what office those gifts were to be exercised.

7. Galatians 3:28 is a bold statement concerning the removal of barriers. Ethnicity, social status and gender should no longer stand in the way. Of what, though? Paul can’t mean that these distinctions had ceased to exist. One doesn’t just stop being either of these. No, Paul speaks in the context of salvation. Greeks, slaves and women can also become sons of God through faith in Christ. Anyone can.

8. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 touches on how the genders should participate in public worship not who should participate. Both men and women were praying and prophesying. It is noteworthy that a headship hierarchy is established in verses 2-3. Christ is the head of man; man of woman; and God of Christ. This referencing back to relationship in the Trinity should not be overlooked. What does headship mean? Both in and outside the New Testament the prominent meaning is to have authority over. Both men and women were to worship publically with this in mind.

9. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is also to be considered. Some take these verses to mean that women should be silent in the public gathering of the church. This can’t be what Paul means since he has previously spoken of women praying and prophesying in such a gathering. Is he then speaking to women interpreting a prophet’s words, as the immediate context might suggest, or to women not causing a disturbance by asking questions and thus disrupting what is fitting and orderly as per verse 40? Whatever the meaning, it is not a call to total silence.

10. 1 Timothy 2:1-15, especially verses 11-15, are key to a complementarian understanding of women and ministry. What is Paul saying that women should do? What is he denying them? Are they not to teach or not to teach in a certain way? Why does he do this? A summary statement such as this can’t go into all the details of answering those questions but complementarians generally see this passage as a prohibition of women teaching men in the gathered assembly with Paul grounding his argument in the order of creation.

**Summary:** Women are to use their gifts and abilities where God calls them for the building up of the body of Jesus Christ. Recognizing their place in God’s creation order, they are not however to be authoritative teachers in the gathered household of God.

**For Further Study:**

John Piper and Wayne Grudem (eds.), *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991)

Andreas Kostenberger and Thomas Schreiner (eds.), *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, 2nd ed.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)

Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Eugene: Multnomah, 2004)

Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006)

**An Egalitarian Perspective on Women and Ministry**

1. (Genesis 1:26-28) Both men and women are created equal by God, fully human and reflecting the image of God. Both are mandated to rule on behalf of God over his creation.

2. (Genesis 2:15-24) Temporal priority does not automatically translate into functional priority. Animals were created before man but do not have functional priority over him. Though created first, the man had a need which was clarified in his aloneness. It’s not just that he needed a companion. He needed a helper. This word “helper” is used of God as a savior, rescuer or protector (see Exodus 18:4; Psalm 33:20). Used of the woman in this text, it isn’t picturing the woman as a servant, subordinate to the man, but of someone equal to and adequate for the man, to complete the man and help him do what God had asked.

3. (Genesis 3:1-24) The woman was the focus of the serpent’s questioning and reasoning. She was deceived and ate the forbidden fruit. The man was there with her and also ate in an act of deliberate disobedience. God held them both accountable. Verse sixteen is not so much a prescription or commandment of what must be but rather a description or prophecy of what would be unless changed. The woman would desire to control or rule the man but the man would rule the woman.

4. Though women were not priests in the Old Testament, they were involved in significant leadership roles. Consider Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21; Micah 6:4); Deborah (Judges 4:4-7); and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20). See also Joel 2:28; Acts 1:8, 14; 2:1-4, 17-18.

5. Jesus Christ stretched and at times broke the cultural and social rules and expectations of the day in regards to women. He treated then with unusual respect and honor: talking to them (John 4); accepting their adoration and worship (Luke 7:36-50); receiving their financial and other support (Luke 8:1-3; and teaching them, allowing them into a discipleship connection with him (Luke 10:38-41). Yes, Jesus did only choose men for the original twelve apostles, yet we don’t know why he did so. Perhaps it was because of the cultural objections and moral suspicions that might have arisen if he had included women in so close a relationship with him.

6. The practice of the early church in regards to women and ministry, especially in the example of the Apostle Paul, is instructive. Women were involved in leadership ministry roles in the church. Consider Junia (Romans 16:7); Priscilla (Acts 18:18-26; Romans 16:3); Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2); Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis (Romans 18:6, 12); and Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3).

7. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 speaks to how the genders should participate in public worship not who should participate. Both men and women were praying and prophesying. A headship hierarchy is established in verses 2-3: Christ to man, man to woman, and God to Christ. Meanings for “head” other than “to have authority over” are possible. Some have suggested “source” while others suggest “prominence or eminence without the idea of ruling.” Both men and women were to worship publically with this in mind; neither was to worship in a dishonorable way. It is noteworthy that Paul emphasizes the interdependence of men and women in verses 8-12. It is also noteworthy that today we attempt to apply the principles of this passage without using the passage’s culturally sensitive symbol.

8. For 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 see point 9 in the above complementarian perspective.

9. In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 Paul places some limits on women in ministry in the church at Ephesus. They were to learn quietly instead of trying to teach authoritatively. In the context of what was happening in Ephesus they weren’t yet ready to teach. They needed to learn first. Paul turns to Adam and Eve as an illustration of what can happen when this learning/teaching order is not observed. The question is whether this is a universal for all places, cultures and times type of prohibition or a culture/time specific one.

10. Galatians 3:28 makes it clear that in the context of salvation, ethnicity, social status and gender should not stand in the way of anyone becoming a son of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Yet it goes beyond this. In Christ these categories no longer have significance. Relationships have been restored. Whatever ministry happens, it should take place in such a way as to enhance not hinder the Gospel

(1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

**Summary:** Women are to use their gifts and abilities wherever God calls them for the sake of the Gospel and the building up of the body of Jesus Christ.

**For Further Study:**

Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)

Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, (eds.), *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy, 2nd ed.* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2005)

John Stackhouse, *Finally Feminist: A Pragmatic Christian Understanding of Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)

Alan F. Johnson, (ed.), *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership: Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010)